

# Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

16 Pentecost  
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Fr. Bill McGinty

## **“Sweet Plastic Jesus!”**

Everyone who is a student of American history knows, that the people of Boston were storing guns, ammunition and gunpowder from around 1771, in out lying towns and villages. As British taxes and government became more and more oppressive, secret meetings of the Sons of Liberty and rebel groups were a common part of life in Massachusetts. They met at Inns and bars, churches and basements. A great part of their planning involved communication, sending out riders to distant areas and informing the frontiersmen of their need for readiness.

The British had their spies and plans as well. When they began to move against the outlying towns, the American early warning system was sent into operation. From Boston to the Ohio River the countryside heard the news like a wildfire spreading across the land.

Anyone who has been to Boston has heard the tale of Paul Rivere’s ride and the Freedom Trail.

We have a saying in Ireland that bad news travels fast. Knowing that today is designated as Evangelism Sunday made me think of those early colonialists, taking the news out to their fellow countrymen and it made me think of Evangelism, which truly means to spread the “Good News.” Great Evangelists spring instantly to mind, John Wesley, Gladys Alywood, Billy Graham and many others. They too, had a message that needed communicating and nothing was going to get in its way.

Evangelism, proclaiming the Gospel, is an obligation that rests on every Christian shoulder. It is a moral obligation. It is something we must do.

In Matthew: 28, Jesus tells his disciples: “Go make disciples of all men, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

To evangelize is, to ‘go out,’ into the community and bring the Good News of Jesus’ teaching. Some people find that extremely hard to do. They would no more be able to talk in public or stand up and read the Gospel publicly, than they would jump out of an airplane.

Yet, Evangelism takes many, many forms: prison ministry is Evangelism, the Daughters of the King ministering to the sick, is Evangelism; J2A is Evangelism; our church school is Evangelism; a soup kitchen is Evangelism; the Cobblestone is Evangelism; so is working with a chorus, Evangelism.

The Rev. William J. McGinty, Rector  
110 West Catharine Street, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337  
Phone: (570) 296-8123 ♦ Fax: (570) 296-4383

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There is also a passive kind of Evangelism, that I call, “witness Evangelism.” The church itself sitting here on the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and Catharine is Evangelism. People pass and look, if we had an Episcopal flag flying high from the church tower that would be Evangelism too. Wearing your cross or Christian symbol is Evangelism.

Greeting the stranger at the door of this church is Evangelism. We have people who have been part of this church for decades who don’t even know that they too are Evangelists. Clean and beautify this church, you are an Evangelist; repair the roof, so that this church speaks of shelter and refuge, you are an Evangelist; feed the hungry in the Food Pantry, you are an Evangelist. For Jesus said in today’s Gospel: “When you did it to one of these my little ones, you did it for me.”

Last spring we inaugurated Evangelism and an Evangelism Program in our Diocese throughout the 14 counties. Its aim is not to swell the numbers of our Parish communities, or to improve our finances. Evangelism has one aim; “to make Jesus Christ known.” Jesus is the Good News and his teaching is the answer to any question you or I care to ask. Our children are in trouble, what can we do? Teach them about Jesus.

My life is filled with despair and hopelessness. What can I do, embrace Christ and his teaching.

The problem of our life today is not that we do not have answers. It is not that we do not know what to do or to whom to turn. The problem in our life today is that we do not know Jesus Christ. Even we, who profess to be Christians, have turned the Messiah, the Savior of the World, the great teacher, the healer, the bringer of peace, into a “Plastic Jesus.”

We can say pious things, and invent pretty prayers, but we fail to recognize Jesus as the “Radical rebel” that he was. It was not “sweet Jesus, meek and mild” that won over Jesus’ Apostles to his side and mission. It was the fiery, angry Jesus who overturned the money changers tables in the Temple. It was the Jesus who railed against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and religious rulers of Israel, who taught one thing but privately practiced another. It was the brave, charismatic, courageous Jesus, who embraced the sinner, the prostitute and the fallen, as he did the leper and the demoniac and cared not a fig for the righteous indignation and judgment of others.

“Sweet Plastic Jesus” is not the man we follow. The man we follow would have thrown the tea into Boston Harbor and refused to pay tax like any of those other rebels.

So, if we are asking you to join our Evangelism Program in the Parish this coming year we are not asking you to sell T-shirts with “I love Jesus too” on their chest. We are asking you to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the witness of your lives.

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“Show me a new convert to the Christian faith and I will show you one person who told them “Come see what Christ can do for you in your life.”

No one is asking you to stand up on a soapbox and defend your faith for three hours on Broad Street on a Saturday afternoon, but, Evangelism asks, and demands, of each of us, that we bare some indication or sign in our life that Jesus Christ means something to us.

In 1989 I was traveling on a packed train from London to the English Lake District. I was going to give a Retreat to 60 nuns. It was hot and I had taken my jacket and Roman collar off. I was seated with three other people and we engaged in lively discussion till I neared my destination and put my jacket and collar back on. I thought the woman opposite me was going to have a heart attack. Her face turned purple. The veins in her neck swelled; her eyes bulged and her lips quivered. In this state she blurted out: “Priests! I hate priests! I hate your Jesus and your God too. Your life is a waste! You know that, don’t you?”

From this I inferred that she was upset that she really had been talking to a clergyman for three hours. But from that day on, I never failed to wear my collar on the train, or the bus, plane or just about anywhere else. Getting insulted because of your faith or what you believe has to be some sort of honor, like an old soldiers battle scar. “Then shall we bare our arms and show our scars and say: These wounds I got on Crispian’s day.”

I hate the idea that there are forces out there stealing the minds and hearts of our children and teens and the values and the traditions that we Americans hold so dear and we Christians are not fighting back.

There are people, who want us to not be so overtly Christian in this campaign. That is not my approach. To me, that is like going into battle with a feather duster and a balloon. No, that’s not for me. I want the weight of the Gospel. I need the fire of St Paul; the courage of Martin Luther, and eloquence of Patrick Henry.

Being a good Evangelism is like being a good journalist: “You know you have the truth and you are not afraid to tell the story.”

Every time you hear that church bell ring, you have to think: “There is the invitation; this is the time to gather. This is when the Gospel is proclaimed.” Just like those sons of Liberty 200 years ago, and more, we have set out to proclaim and fight for what we value and believe in every ministry, with every pastoral visit, in every fund raiser; in every hymn, we must make ourselves heard; we must raise high the cross in our life, that one day, its values may mean the same in our children’s.

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Jesus is Lord. He is the answer to this world's salvation. What he teaches I will proclaim. Where he leads I will follow, and that is Evangelism, not hidden, not secret, not disguised. No, this is naked Evangelism.

So with St Paul we too can say:

“I am not ashamed of the Gospel. To me it is life, a life so great, that the darkness of death can not overcome it.”

Let our prayer be: “Jesus is Lord of my life.”

Amen+