

<sup>29</sup> The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, ‘Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! <sup>30</sup>This is he of whom I said, “After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.” <sup>31</sup>I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.’ <sup>32</sup>And John testified, ‘I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. <sup>33</sup>I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, “He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” <sup>34</sup>And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.’

35 The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, <sup>36</sup>and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, ‘Look, here is the Lamb of God!’ <sup>37</sup>The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup>When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, ‘What are you looking for?’ They said to him, ‘Rabbi’ (which translated means Teacher), ‘where are you staying?’ <sup>39</sup>He said to them, ‘Come and see.’ They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. <sup>40</sup>One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. <sup>41</sup>He first found his brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated Anointed).

### **Come and See**

It’s interesting how certain words and names elicit such powerful feelings in a person based on the history of those words or names. Our last presidential election is a prime example, with the brand name ‘Clinton’ pitted against the brand name ‘Trump.’ Both names carried baggage, just as the names ‘Bush’ or ‘Kennedy’ carry baggage. Some of you are familiar with part of Staten Island that is now called *Charleston*, and you probably know that before it was Charleston it was known as *Kreischersville*, but because of anti-German sentiment in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Around the world you’re not likely to find many people with the last name ‘Hitler’ anymore because of the reputation of a single person.

Well, the word *evangelism* has also fallen into disrepute. If I called you and asked you to lead the evangelistic ministries of this church you’d probably start having images of yourself standing among a crowd on the Staten Island Ferry declaring something about salvation and handing out tracts, and you’d probably say to me, “No thank you.” We usually imagine an evangelist as someone who makes you feel at the very least uncomfortable if not irritated! Many of you have probably had the experience of an evangelist who asks if you’ve accepted Jesus and if you know where you’ll go if you die today. We don’t like the word “evangelist” and so we’re not likely to engage in the process of “evangelism” in the way that modern “evangelists” seem to do it, with a focus on the hereafter as if God’s main concern is whether you meet the qualifications for “heaven” or not.

It's a shame that this word has gained such a negative connotation, because *evangelism* is really a good and basic thing. The word *evangelist* (εὐαγγελιστής – *euanglistes*) comes from the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον (yooahngellion), which means GOOD NEWS. The word *angel* (ἄγγελος - *anglaus*) is also derived from that word, and the word *angel* in both Greek and Hebrew is understood as a messenger from God. Most of us would consider the modern-day evangelist as the bearer of anything but good news and certainly not coming from God.

So an evangelist is simply a person who brings a message of good news from God, and we Christians understand that the good news has something to do with Jesus. But that's where we start to screw it up. We start to distort the original message and turn it into bad news disguised as good news. We tell people to do such and such, to pray a prayer so they'll be "saved" and go to heaven, then we walk away and look for our next prospect. And those who are *evangelized* may indeed feel 'saved,' but they may eventually wonder if there's something else that's supposed to happen. John Wesley did not dismiss this kind of conversion, but he said that there are other ways that people come to Jesus, and that very often it's a gradual process. **AND IT'S NOT A PROCESS OF COMING TO ACCEPT SOME DOCTRINE; IT'S A PROCESS OF COMING TO KNOW JESUS WHO IS INDEED THE GOOD NEWS.**

Our scripture story paints a picture of what evangelism should look like and sound like. John the Baptist seems to be the first evangelist who testifies about his experience baptizing Jesus, about the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove and remaining with Jesus, and he refers to Jesus as both Lamb of God and Son of God. No mention of salvation. No mention of hell. Just the mention of Jesus and his experience with Jesus. It's enough to intrigue at least two of his disciples who follow Jesus and are invited to spend an afternoon with Jesus. It is after that brief time that those disciples went out and started telling others about Jesus beginning with their closest kin. They weren't pressured. They didn't take any tracts. They weren't told to pray for salvation. In fact it doesn't mention that Jesus sent them out. They just went out on their own volition and started *inviting others to come and see Jesus*. And when they met Jesus, they were hooked. **THE GOOD NEWS WAS THE ARRIVAL OF THE SON OF GOD WHO WAS BRINGING THE KINGDOM OF GOD WITH HIM**, not telling them how to get to some spiritual realm after they died, but telling them that the kingdom had come. Anyone who follows the risen Savior knows that the Kingdom has indeed come, which is good news. And we accept Jesus as the King of that Kingdom. No, the Kingdom has not been established in every corner of the earth, nor in the heart of every Christian. But inasmuch as we have made Jesus our true Lord and walk with him, we know that the kingdom has come. And with the kingdom comes joy and a peace that transcends our understanding. That's good news! And it's news that we naturally want to share with those around us, starting with those closest to us.

Last week we had a worship planning meeting, and we discussed making this Sunday an "invite your neighbor Sunday." We decided not to because the invitations you extend should not be done out of a sense of obligation but out of sincere love and joy. *If you are meeting Jesus here in this place, through the Word of God, through the sacraments, through the fellowship and ministry*, then you will quite naturally invite others to meet him. He's that kind of guy.

The better you know him, the closer you walk with him, and the closer you walk with him the better you know him, and the relationship grows, and your life is transformed, so that YOU

become a witness to Jesus Christ in the life that you live, and then people like Andrew and Peter will also be drawn to Jesus by being drawn to you. So many people want to short-circuit the evangelism process by making it all about a promise to believe a doctrine and thinking that if their numbers are good God will be pleased. God doesn't want you to make some oath; he wants to change your heart, and that change will occur as you spend more time with Jesus. *THEN your evangelism will be fluid and sincere.* Rather than approaching people and telling them what to believe, you will take a genuine interest in the person and ask "What is it you seek?" That's how Jesus approaches us when we approach him, and he doesn't disappoint us.

So I invite you to come and see Jesus. You meet him in those who dwell in him, whose lives are transformed by him, and YOUR LIFE CAN BE TRANSFORMED, TOO. But I don't believe in shortcuts. Even Andrew and the other disciple had to spend a few hours with Jesus before they could go and enthusiastically proclaim him to be the Savior. To sincerely proclaim Jesus as your savior, he must indeed be your savior, the one who saves you from a life lived in futility, a life wasted in pursuit of temporal pleasure rather than pursuing treasures in heaven where neither moth nor decay destroys.

So evangelize, but evangelize because you want to evangelize, you want to invite others to meet Jesus, to know him, to hear what he has to say, and, like you, to *follow* him. And God willing, may you find Jesus here, in this church. And may you endeavor to make his presence ever more apparent here as we trod the path on which he leads us. Amen.