

United Church in the Valley: June 2, 2019  
Student Minister: Matthew Heesing  
***Making Space for the Sharing***  
**Pt V: "...through Proclamation!"**

**Note:** *Pt IV of this series ("...through Personal Stories")  
was a series of personal faith stories from members of the congregation.*

Scripture Reading:

*Acts 1:8:*

Jesus said to his disciples,  
"You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit  
to empower you and assist you,  
as you follow in God's Way.

And you will be my witnesses,  
sharing what you have seen and heard  
in Jerusalem,  
in all of Judea and Samaria,  
and to the ends of the earth."

**Sermon on following page.**

Sermon:

The word “evangelism”  
comes from the late Latin word “evangelium”  
which itself comes from the Ancient *Greek* word  
“euangelion” which means “good news.”

But it gets better!

“Euangelion” comes from two even older Greek words  
“eu,” meaning goodness,  
and “angellein,” meaning “to announce.”

All of which to say, word “evangelism” literally means,  
*to announce goodness,*  
*to share good news.*

So why is it, then, that evangelism--  
the announcement of goodness  
the sharing of good news—  
so often feels like *bad news*  
when we hear it?

Here in the United Church of Canada,  
evangelism is almost like a curse word.  
We avoid it and don’t talk about the “e” word often  
for the notion makes us nervous;  
when someone, especially *the minister*,  
starts speaking about “evangelism,”  
we back up slowly,  
we feel self-conscious and uncomfortable in our seats,  
perhaps because we’ve seen it done so poorly in the past,  
or perhaps we have encountered others  
who were quick to confuse evangelism with conversion.  
Whatever the case, this idea that is so positive, exciting at its core,  
evangelism comes across—at best—as a bore,  
or even more, something we actively avoid and ignore,  
or at worst, a notion that people have come to abhor—  
Why is that?  
Well, it’s complicated.  
But part of why, at least to me,  
evangelism—the announcement of good news—  
comes across as *bad news*  
is because we often leap right to the act of proclamation,  
without a healthy and positive foundation first.

And that’s what the last five weeks have all been about:  
making space in our lives for the sharing—  
the sharing of goodness, the announcing of good news—  
through five sequential foundational steps,

and the first, was peace:  
 for before the initial disciples  
 went out into the world,  
 Jesus came among them  
 and said “Peace be with you,”  
 for if we are worried about  
 either being too much  
 or too little—not enough—  
 evangelism will be very tough to practice.  
 Receiving the peace of Christ,  
 the reminder to be at ease,  
 to let our own anxieties cease,  
 to know that we have nothing to prove, is essential  
 before we even start  
 to respond.

And the second step  
 in making space for the sharing  
 was presence:  
 the way that we come *alongside* others,  
 instead of standing in front and confronting,  
 and rather than interrupting or disrupting,  
 to simply meet others  
*exactly* where they are on the journey,  
 putting our own agenda to the side.

We saw this in the story of the disciples  
 on the road to Emmaus,  
 and how Jesus joined them on the road that day,  
 in a subtle, gentle, from-the-side way  
 that caused the two disciples later to say,  
 “Were not our hearts burning within us  
 while he was talking to us on the road?”

Making Space for the Sharing  
 starts with peace, and moves into presence,  
 and continues with intentional preparation.  
 “Always be prepared to share the reason  
 for the hope that you have”—  
 that was the reading that we heard two weeks ago.  
 And we took the time, that Sunday,  
 to think about our own faith journey,  
 to *reflect* on the reasons for the hope that we each have.

And last week,  
 in this process of making space for the sharing,  
 we embarked on the fourth step: personal stories.

Because evangelism is not about someone else's beliefs—  
it's all about yours.

It revolves around the good news, the goodness,  
that you have experienced and felt yourself,  
and how it has impacted you, for the better.

And I'm so grateful  
that Linda and Carla  
could model for us what that looks like,  
by sharing their own personal stories last Sunday.  
Thank you.

Which brings us to today,  
and the conclusive calling of Jesus to his disciples  
to make a proclamation,  
to be his "witnesses,  
sharing what they have seen and heard themselves  
in Jerusalem,  
in all of Judea and Samaria,  
and to the very ends of the earth."

Proclamation is the fifth and final step  
in making space for the sharing.  
But so often, at least in my own experience,  
this is the step that most people immediately jump to  
when attempting to put evangelism into practice.

And when that happens,  
it often sounds like this:  
"Let me tell the good news that you need right now."  
Or "Have you been saved?"  
(How many of you have heard that one?)  
Or, my personal favourite,  
"Have you found Jesus?"  
(To which a friend of mine always answers,  
"I didn't know he was missing!")

Proclamation *is* important—  
we are called to confidently say to someone else,  
this has been good news to me,  
I think it might be good news for you too—  
but when we do that  
as the first step,  
without initially building a foundation,  
gosh, can it sure come across  
as condemnation.

Proclamation minus peace, presence, preparation and personal story  
 equals an almost-*accusatory*-sounding message,  
 but if we start with peace,  
 and come alongside others with presence,  
 and take the time for preparation,  
 and begin a conversation with our own story,  
*then* the proclamation that proceeds  
 easily leads to transformation—  
 it puts into motion a ripple effect that almost-contagiously  
 can't help but radiate outwards,  
 extending from deep within  
 affecting the closest individuals around us  
 and onwards, influencing our communities  
 and continuing even further beyond.

For that's the image we find in our reading:  
 "You will be my witnesses," says Jesus,  
 to *Jerusalem*, in all of *Judea and Samaria*,  
 and to the very *ends of the earth*."

Starting from the disciples themselves,  
 to Jerusalem, the city in which they are gathered,  
 to the regions around them—Judea and Samaria—  
 and after that—well, they can't even imagine.  
 Ever-increasing concentric circles,  
 like little Russian nesting dolls of Good News,  
 like ripples all across the global pond,  
 is how Jesus imagines people will respond  
 when proclamation is done well.

And I think that I agree.  
 I think the world is hungry for *goodness*,  
 I think our communities are *yearning* for Good News,  
 and while there's lots of different views  
 on spirituality and wholeness and the divine,  
 I have constantly witnessed how *this one* is transformational,  
 I know that the Christian faith has changed my life profoundly  
 and could make a difference in yours too.  
 Now it's true, that some may not agree with me—and that's okay—  
 but when evangelism happens in a way  
 that *goodness* is announced and *good news* is shared—  
 when we have dared to do the work of making space  
 for the sharing,  
 there's no telling how many people  
 will find this proclamation *so* compelling—  
 from this room, to Turner Valley and Black Diamond  
 to all across the Foothills and further.

But if this all feels rather overwhelming,  
 let's take heart in the first part of the reading from Jesus:  
*"You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit  
 to empower you and assist you,  
 as you follow in God's Way."*

Not only does Jesus describe  
 a certain radiating, rippling power  
 that comes *through us from* proclamation—  
*"you will be my witnesses,  
 to Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria  
 and to the very ends of the earth"*—  
 he also describes a certain power  
 that *comes to us for* the act of proclamation itself.  
*"You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit  
 to empower you and assist you,  
 as you follow in God's Way."*

Now I don't know about you,  
 but with such a promise like that today,  
 how can we not, in our own little way,  
 in this particular time and place,  
 embrace the invitation  
 of making space for the sharing?

People of God, let's be daring!  
 Let's not be nervous or afraid,  
 for we know the Holy Spirit will come to our aid,  
 whenever we choose to answer the call  
 of the risen Christ who invites us all  
 to make space for the sharing  
 of good news  
 to do a declaring,  
 an announcing, of goodness  
 through peace, presence,  
 preparation, personal story  
 and proclamation,  
 with the empowerment and accompaniment  
 of the Holy Spirit  
 every faithful step of the way.  
*"You will be my witnesses,  
 to Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria  
 and to the very ends of the earth"*—  
 So what do you say, church?  
 What *will* you say?

Thanks be to God.