

Proper 7, Year A

Genesis 21:8-21

Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17

Romans 6:1b-11

Matthew 10:24-39

As many of you know,
this afternoon
St. Anne's is hosting—
on behalf of the larger Diocese—
an evangelism workshop.

Yes, you heard that right:
an evangelism workshop
in an Episcopal church.

We will be joined 1-4 p.m. today
by the Rev. Canon Stephanie Spellers
from the Presiding Bishop's office,
along with Carrie Headington
and Jeremy Tackett:
three wonderful Episcopalians,
three happy evangelists,
and three of the nicest people
you'll ever want to meet.

Stephanie, Carrie, and Jeremy
will be leading us and our guests
from across the Diocese
in a conversation
about *how* and *why*
we can and *should*
invite others into the joy
of our robust faith.

I am beyond excited about this,
and I hope you are, too,
because although we Episcopalians
hold such a great treasure—
the treasure of ancient worship,
the treasure of a reasoned faith,
the treasure of a communion
grounded unashamedly in
love, healing, forgiveness, and grace—
we are not always sure
how to share it,

how to talk about it, or
how to invite others into it.

The Rev. Canon Frank Logue,
our Canon to the Ordinary
here in the Diocese of Georgia,
says that we Episcopalians are
“God’s shy people.”
We don’t want to be pushy.
We don’t want to make a fuss.
Thus, all too often, we say nothing
about the very thing—
about the very *One*—
who has changed our lives forever.

So y’all come on.
This workshop is for you.
You *are* our evangelists.
There are no others,
no “professional” evangelists
waiting to do it for you.
Come on out,
see what you might learn,
and have a good time.

* * *

Now, I say all of that,
and I *do* mean all of that,
but I must confess
it is not lost on me
that in today’s Gospel,
Jesus seems to be doing
everything he can
to downright sabotage all of that!

At this point in the Gospel,
Jesus has called the twelve together.
He’s got them all ready to go out on their first mission:
to go tell the Good News,
to go spread the good word,
to go be evangelists.

And so he does what we’re doing today:
he sits them down for an evangelism workshop.
And as they lean forward with bated breath

to hear his words of instruction and wisdom,
he looks them in the eye, and he says:

“I have not come to bring peace,
but a sword. . . .

Whoever loves father or
mother more than me
is not worthy of me;
whoever loves son or
daughter more than me
is not worthy of me;
whoever does not
take up the cross and follow me
is not worthy of me.”

Gahhh-leeee.

I read that and feel like saying,
“Come on, Jesus!
We’re trying to get people to *come in*,
not to go running away screaming!
You’re not helping!”

But as you know,
we have to dance with the Jesus that brought us,
not the Jesus we want him to be.

And so, even as we talk today
about the great joy
of inviting others into our faith,
we still have to listen to our Master,
and we still have to realize
that he is right
when he assures us
that bringing others
into the life he offers
will not be easy.

When Jesus sends his apostles into the world,
he is not sending them to offer cheap invitations
to a community yard sale
or a comfortable coffee hour.

No, when Jesus sends his disciples into the world,
he is sending them to turn it upside down.

Yes . . . to bring healing.

Yes . . . to offer forgiveness.

Yes . . . to fling wide the doors to God's unfailing love.

But don't you know?

Haven't you looked around

and seen that *all* of that—

as wonderful as it all sounds—

all of that stands in direct opposition

to everything the world holds dear?

That was the truth of the world then,

and it is the truth of the world now.

You see, our faith, our salvation, our life—

the very thing that Jesus comes to give us—

is more than just a church that we belong to.

It's more than just a club.

It's more than just a Facebook page

that makes us feel good,

or a bunch of people who try to get along

and be nice to each other at least once a week.

No, our faith—

the thing into which we are inviting others—

is the very antithesis

to everything

the world stands for.

So yeah.

The sword that Jesus brings—

yes, it *is* the sword of healing,

yes, it *is* the sword of forgiveness,

yes, it *is* the sword of God's love—

but you better believe

it cuts

right to the heart of the matter.

Jesus wants nothing more

than to cut through all our flabby pretense,

through all the stupid stories we tell ourselves,

through all the garbage we say

to convince ourselves and one another

that we've got our lives figured out and under control.

With grace as sharp as a double-edged blade,

Jesus cuts through it all,

reaches in for our hearts and says,

"STOOOOPPPPP.

Let it go.
Let it go, and trust me.”

We cling so desperately
to the notion of being
self-made,
self-assured,
self-*everything*.
Is it any surprise, then,
that the love that sets us free
from the burden of all of that selfishness
feels like nothing less than a sword?

The difference is that
his is not a sword that cuts us down.
His is a sword that sets us free.

* * *

I am excited about today.
I am excited about learning
how to invite others in,
how to welcome others to the faith,
how to share the glorious riches we have found.

I am excited to be an Episcopalian,
to be an evangelist,
to be a Christian
alive in this world with you.

But most of all,
I gotta tell ya,
I am excited to have a Savior
who tells me
that I don't have to be perfect,
that I don't have to have it all figured out,
that I am a sinner,
and a scamp,
and a scoundrel,
and a hot mess,
and that God loves me *ANYWAY*.

And you know what?
He is right:
at the end of the day,
that love is better

than *any* other family,
any other relationship,
any other political leanings,
any other identity,
any other club,
any other tribe
that I will ever be a part of.
His love cuts like a sword through it all,
and without reservation or condition,
declares to my hurting, selfish heart:
“YOU . . . ARE . . . MINE.”

THAT, my friends,
is what we are inviting others into.
THAT is the Good News we have to share.

Not everyone’s going to want it;
not everyone’s going to think they need it;
and some are going to think they’ve already heard it all
a thousand times before.

But *you* know what it’s like
to be surrounded
in communion, healing, forgiveness, and grace.
You know what it’s like
to have your world turned upside down
by something stronger than family, politics, or tribe.
You know what it’s like
to be set free—
to be CUT free—
from the crippling expectations
we all heap upon ourselves
like some new twist to the age-old Law.

So, in the words of the Master:
“What I’ve told you in the dark,
go and say in the light;
what you’ve heard here in whispers,
go and shout from the housetops;
take up your cross,
and be not afraid.”

Y’all, we have Good News to tell.
Let’s get to it.

Amen.