

Year B, June 17, 2018  
4 Pentecost (Proper 6)  
Christ Church, Mexia

The late Rev. Billy Graham has been quoted as saying: "The evangelistic harvest is always urgent. The destiny of men and of nations is always being decided. Every generation is strategic. We are not responsible for the past generation, and we cannot bear the full responsibility for the next one, but we do have our generation. God will hold us responsible as to how well we fulfill our responsibilities to this age and take advantage of our opportunities."

Oh, no! He said the "e" word – evangelism. How scary is that? Do we really have to do that? I have to tell you that even some ministers find evangelism scary, especially when we think of it in terms of the normal stereotype of someone in your face asking if you have a close personal relationship with Jesus Christ, or if you have accepted him as your personal savior, and maybe quoting scripture or talking about the alternative of hell. Most of us have probably had a bad experience by being the object of what I'll call "pushy" evangelism, for lack of a better term. I recall several years ago when Janet shared the following story with me. One of her students was telling her about going on a mission trip in the summer to England. And Janet asked her what she was going to do while she was there. The young woman said she was going to teach them about Jesus. Janet, knowing about the Church of England, asked if many people in England already went to church, and the student replied, "Oh, they just do ceremony and stuff, they don't have a personal relationship with Jesus. We have to save them." Look out, Anglicans. Well there are many ways in which to view evangelism.

So, let's look at evangelism in ways that Jesus suggests in the gospel this morning. But first, let's recall that evangelism IS important, even if it makes us uncomfortable to consider it. William Temple, for example, reminds us, "The church is the only cooperative society in the world that exists for the benefit of its nonmembers." In other words, we are not just here to take care of ourselves, our members, like most cooperative organizations – though that is a part of it; we have an obligation to expand Jesus' church, to take the message of God's love and God's grace to others who need to know about it as much as we do. Doesn't it help you to know and believe?

Chris Lyons warns us that: "There is a subtle false teaching that says we can be evangelical without being evangelistic. It has us believe we 'go' to church rather than we 'are' the church." Do you see the difference? - the implications of this statement? And Eric Liddell reminds us, "We are all missionaries. Wherever we go, we either bring people nearer to Christ, or we repel them from Christ." Think about it.

And that to me is the message I get from Jesus today. We scatter the seed and go about our lives, but the seed grows. God takes care of the rest. If we can just sow good seed - to live in the way that we profess is the right way to live. If we treat people, all people, with dignity and respect. If we live according to our Baptismal Covenant. Then people will be drawn to Jesus and to the church. But when we don't, it is their best excuse to run away.

We don't have to do great things. Great things, like giant mustard shrubs, grow from the tiniest seeds! Just small acts of kindness, a smile, listening to someone who needs to talk, expressing care and support in times of grief, illness, etc. - all of these can produce enormous benefits and make people want to be a part of the church. You don't have to preach like Paul, or Billy Graham. You don't have to quote scripture or talk in ways with which you are not comfortable. You just need to live like a Christian!

Let me illustrate with the following true story from Steve Sjogren's book, *Conspiracy of Kindness*: Joe Delaney and his eight-year-old son Jared were playing catch in their back yard. "Jared asked, 'Dad, is there a God?' Joe replied that he went to church only a few times when he was a kid; he really had no idea. Jared ran into the house. 'I'll be right back,' he yelled. Moments later he returned with a helium balloon from the circus, a pen, and an index card. 'I'm going to send God an airmail message,' he explained. 'Dear God,' wrote Jared, 'if you are real and you are there, send people who know you to Dad and me.' God, I hope you're watching, Joe thought, as they watched the balloon and message sail away.

Two days later, Joe and Jared pulled into a car wash sponsored by Sjogren's church. When Joe asked, 'How much?' Sjogren answered, 'It's free. No strings attached. We just want to show God's love in a practical way.'" From that encounter, they began to believe. Many people may be only one small act of kindness from believing and finding their salvation.

It doesn't require that much. May we be evangelical through our lives!

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.  
Amen.