

## **CATCHING PEOPLE AND EVANGELISM.** Epiphany 5 2025 All Souls' dtw

From our Gospel this morning:

*Jesus said to Simon "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people" (Luke 5.10b)*

And from our Epistle: Paul writes

*Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe (1 Cor 15.11)*

Just a few chapters earlier, St Paul would write boldly to the Corinthian Church, 'Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel!' (1 Cor 9.16) Following his conversion, the preaching of the gospel became Paul's only reason for being. His experience of the grace of God was so profound that his whole being could only respond with Gospel proclamation as far as his feet would take him. I think he must have driven some of his hearers crazy with his insistent and constant spruiking! I also think that he would have been staggered to discover that his letters became Gospel too. Paul, who one persecuted Christians, became preoccupied with catching Christians.

The word for 'the gospel' in the Greek is 'euangelion'. It also means 'good news'. 'Gospel' and 'Good News' are frequently interchangeable in the New Testament. The Greek word 'euangelizomai' means 'I bring good news, I preach good tidings.' From these Greek roots we get the words 'Evangel', 'Evangelism' and 'Evangelise'. The Greek word for 'proclamation' is 'kerugma' which is often linked to the evangel. E.g. At Bethany when Jesus is anointed by the woman with the alabaster jar of precious ointment he says, 'Truly I tell you, wherever this good news (evangel) is proclaimed (kerugma) in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her. (Mt 26.13) What is the 'good news'? I think that every Christian should have a personal answer for that. The good news for *me* is that in the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ I find everything that is decisive for my life. But the Gospel imperative means that I must not keep that good news to myself. That is where Evangelism comes in.

**Evangelism simply means the Proclamation of the Gospel.** The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary defines Evangelism as preaching or promulgation of the Gospel. But just in case we think that it is only a matter of words, we need to think again. Evangelism always needs to be earthed in this world's needs. A lovely African definition says it all. 'Evangelism is one hungry person telling another hungry person where to find bread'. This is particularly poignant when we consider Jesus' bias toward the poor; Jesus does not require an evangelism which is so heavenly minded that it is of no earthly good. Indeed, the late Peter Allan (not the singer but a priest) – once Director of Anglicare WA, said in a sermon in my hearing, "The gospel is not just about social justice; the gospel IS social justice." In my own experience as a Christian and a priest, I have seen many more people caught in the net of the Kingdom through care, friendship and compassion than I have by mere words, biblical or otherwise.

How do we stop being lulled into mediocrity by institutional 'privatisation' of religion and faith and start discerning together what we are being called to do as a Christian community? Can justice and healing and care for the earth flow naturally out of our transformation into Christ's likeness, as they do for those communities that are inspired by people like St Francis and St Benedict? We need a new holiness and a new wholeness...we need to pray together, and discern the one thing needful, the thing that will make a difference.

Robert Warren, in *The Healthy Churches Handbook*, describes the

### **Seven Marks of a Healthy Church**

1. **Energised by faith** (not merely in survival mode)
2. **Outward-looking focus** (with a 'whole life', not just 'church life' concern)
3. **Seeks to find out what God wants** (Spirit-led, not trying to please everyone)
4. **Faces the cost of change and growth** (rather than avoiding, resisting it)
5. **Operates as a Community** (rather than an in-house club or organisation)
6. **Makes room for all** (inclusive not exclusive)
7. **Does a few things and does them well** (focused rather than frenetic)

I can see much of this already happening here at All Souls'. I believe this is a healthy, loving community. But we could still be more intentional and purposeful in some areas, especially outreach. I look forward to doing more exploring with you and with our partner community at St Theodore's, Toorak Gdns over this coming year.

I conclude with a reflection which lends the title to my little book: *If Fish is All You Want*, based on the Gospel text. Jesus said to Simon, "From now on you will be catching people".

### **The Fish Van**

*There's a man who drives around our neighborhood in a specially fitted and refrigerated van (like the ones you see selling ice-cream) with some big fish painted on it. That's what he sells: fish. And if fish is all you want, fish is all you get.*

*But if you notice his calm and cheerful attitude to his work and to his customers, however quiet or busy it is, and then you notice a smaller symbol of a fish stuck on his van as well, you may just find more than you bargained for. This man who sells fish is a Christian, and his van bears the symbol of a quiet revolution. You can see it on the occasional car that passes by, and hanging around the occasional neck. He will tell you what it means if you don't know. His quiet witness has drawn some people to Christ. A magnetic smile, some loving availability, and the explanation of that fish sign, and they're caught, hook, line and sinker.*

*Lord Jesus, as I follow you, make me an instrument of your kingdom. Show me in my own life, my own work, my own situation, the way to draw people to you, quietly, unassumingly, but ever so powerfully, for your love's sake. Amen*