



January 15, 2006

Preaching: Pastor Rich French

I Samuel 3: 1-10

John 1: 43-51

“Made Ya Look!”

Prayer: Lord my prayer this morning is that my words reflect your love, and that through your grace those who hear them, receive them.

AMEN

In our gospel lesson today Philip told to Nathanael to come and see. Philip wanted Nathanael to see for himself, who Jesus was and come and see was his way of inviting him to do so. Philip had gotten Nathanael’s attention and the rest he would leave to Jesus.

As a youngster I would do almost anything to get peoples attention, I suppose it could be said that I haven’t changed all that much. I was prone to silly things like that simple little game of pointing and shouting some surprising thing just so that I could make someone look around. Then much to my own amusement I would shriek with all the excitement I could muster that I had “Made Ya Look!”

In yet one more way I can see just how much I was being prepared for the life I would one day lead as a proclaimer of the Gospel or Good News of Jesus Christ? I must say that when I first set out on the message for today I was really uncomfortable with the idea that I be the object upon which all sight would be cast. Once again in my own over confident yet insecure way, I became not only willing, but also somehow excited about the opportunity I had before me. I can further illustrate through the words of others.

First from a sermon written by the author of a text I had to read for my preaching class two summers ago. The author is Tom Long and the textbook is called the Witness of Preaching. This is from a sermon he wrote called “What Do You See?”

It was a rollicking night at the theater. A young actor named Tom Key was playing the part of Jesus in the play “Cotton Patch Gospel” and he was clearly bringing the

house down. The play, a romping, bluegrass musical which depicts the ministry of Jesus as if it had occurred in the cotton fields and Baptist churches of rural south Georgia, was in its final performance run, and Key was feeling confident and even inventive with his lines. His spontaneous enthusiasm was contagious, and he had forged between himself and the audience a rare bond of mutual exchange and appreciation.

During the scene depicting the Sermon on the Mount, Key, as Jesus, suddenly turned from the group on the stage toward the audience, pointed to the blank auditorium side wall, and said, "Look at the lilies in that field ..." He stopped, almost as if he had forgotten the next line, peered around at the disciples, focused again on the audience and repeated, "Look at the lilies in that field ..." Once more he stopped and seemed to be searching for the next words. The audience began to shift uncomfortably. His hand extended yet again to the blank wall, and this time he spoke the words slowly and deliberately, "Look ... at ... the ... lilies ... in ... that ... field ..." Now he turned to the disciples, shrugging his shoulders, and said, "I can't get them to look." The room filled with laughter as it dawned on the audience that he really wanted us to look. And sure enough, when he gave one more try, "Look at the lilies in that field ..." every head in the audience turned toward the side wall.

I do not know whether old John the Evangelist was present in the theater that night, but, if not, he should have been. It was his kind of show. Indeed, he spends his entire Gospel trying to get people to look, really to look, at the life of Jesus. Light and darkness, vision and dimness, "once I was blind, but now I see," these are the materials of John's Gospel. Chapter after chapter, John's finger points toward his Lord and his voice sounds the refrain, "Look ... look ... look."

I guess this puts me in some pretty good company, John the Evangelist, Actor Tom Key, and published author Thomas Long.

Methodism began as a lay movement. For John Wesley, preaching and testifying belonged to the whole church. At the beginning of the Wesleyan revival, lay people were utilized to spread the gospel. Wesley felt it was a fatal mistake to leave the task of spreading the gospel to the ordained clergy. Witnessing was the task of the whole church. He felt it was heresy to turn the ministry of the Christian church into a clergy-dominated religion. Across the world, church growth is the greatest where the laity are the most involved. The small group movement, which is lay-centered like early Methodism with its class meetings, is putting vitality, vision, and enthusiasm back into the church.

Do you remember the Mercedes TV commercial a few years ago that showed a Mercedes crashing into a concrete wall during a safety test? An engineer in a white lab coat walks over after the crash and kneels down to examine the damage, which is

minimal. A reporter then asks the engineer about Mercedes' energy absorbing car body. After the engineer tells all about the unique design the reporter asks him why Mercedes doesn't enforce their patent on the design, a design evidently copied by several other companies because of its success.

The engineer then replies matter-of-factly, "Because some things in life are too important not to share." How true this is. There are many things in life that fall into this "too important not to share" category. Advances in science, in medicine, in technology. But all of these pale in importance to that of sharing our faith.

However the only thing worse than a pushy telemarketer is a know-it-all evangelist. It is hard to imagine that, in an effort to spread the news of Christ, we can - at times- so thoroughly repel the very people we are trying to attract. There certainly is a style of evangelism that mimics the pushy sales person. The evangelist of this style pushes, bullies, scares and uses anything to get his way with the potential convert. I have had people who have tried to convert me, though I tell them I'm Christian, though I tell them I'm active in a church, though I tell them I'm already a pastor! These people seem to know what is best for everyone else. This particular style of evangelism is so frightening to most of us that we avoid evangelism all together. We are in such fear that we will be seen as pushy and overbearing, we avoid anything that might remotely be construed as evangelism.

One day St. Francis of Assisi, invited a young monk to join him on a trip into town to preach. The young monk was so honored to get such an invitation from St. Francis that he quickly accepted. All day long, he and St. Francis walked through the streets and byways, alleys and suburbs, and they rubbed shoulders with hundreds of people.

At the end of the day, the two headed back home, however, not even once had St. Francis addressed a crowd, nor had he talked to anyone about the gospel. The young monk was greatly disappointed, and he said to St. Francis, "I thought we were going into town to preach?" St. Francis responded, "My son, we have preached. We were preaching while we were walking. We were seen by many and our behavior was closely watched. It is of no use to walk anywhere to preach unless we preach everywhere as we walk!"

To share one's faith is to enrich one's faith There is one variety of zinnia that is called "Cut and Come Again." It is well-named. When one flower is cut it seems like three blossoms are ready to take its place. The more you cut and give away, the more you have. That is exactly what happens when you share your faith. The more you give away, the more you have. God has given you this treasure to share. By sharing your faith you enrich your faith.

It's no secret that we, the church, have forgotten what it means to preach the gospel, what it means to bring to others the good news, what it means to evangelize. The word evangelism has become a dirty word in some churches, and if it isn't outright dismissed altogether, then it is relegated as a task for only those who have been ordained, or for those who are the professional speakers, who make a living giving their testimonials and asking for altar calls, or for those who are missionaries overseas. It's just not that way at all!

A Baptist pastor in Worcester, Massachusetts, was crossing the Atlantic by ship some years ago. He noticed on several occasions a man sitting in a deck chair reading a Bible. One day the pastor sat down beside him and said, "Forgive my curiosity. I'm a Baptist minister. I notice you are a faithful Bible reader. I'd like to meet you." After introductions, the man said, "I am Filipino. I was born into a good Catholic home. I went to the United States as a young man to study in one of your fine universities, intending to become a lawyer. On my first day on campus, a student dropped by to visit. He welcomed me and offered to help in any way he could. Then he asked me where I went to church. I told him I was Catholic. He explained that the Catholic Church was quite a distance away, but he sat down and drew me a map. I thanked him and he left.

"On the following Sunday morning it was raining. I decided to just skip church. But then there was a knock on my door. There stood my new friend and he was holding two umbrellas. He said that he worried that I might not be able to read his map. So, he said he would escort me to the Catholic church. I hurriedly dressed, thinking all the while what an unusually thoughtful person he was. I wondered what church he belonged to.

"As we walked along I asked him about his church. He said that his church was just around the corner. So, I suggested that we go to his church this Sunday, and then to mine the following Sunday. He agreed. But somehow I felt so much at home in his church that I never got around to finding mine. After four years I felt that God was leading me into the ordained ministry rather than into law. I went to Drew University Seminary and was ordained a Methodist minister. Then I returned to the Philippines to serve in a Methodist parish. My name is Valencius, Bishop Valencius, Bishop of the Methodist Church in the Philippines."

The hero of the story is not the Bishop, important though he is. The hero is that anonymous young man with two umbrellas. Whether they ended up at the Methodist or Catholic churches doesn't really matter. Go all the way back to the beginning of Christian history and you'll always find him. He is behind almost every Christian convert...that unnamed man or woman with two umbrellas...that person with a winsome faith who builds a bridge of friendship with another person. And across that

bridge walks the living Christ and claims another eternal soul. You can be that person with two umbrellas. You can be like Andrew! Invitational and willing to be so.

Take a moment and think about the good things that come from our looking at and inviting others to look at the life, and lessons of Jesus.

1. Generosity, of time, talent and treasures. Jesus always had time for those in need, and for those willing to share what they had,
2. Justice, Jesus was willing to stand for the underdog and could show the oppressor a way to come closer to God by coming closer to those under them.
3. Care, physically, emotionally, and spiritually for ourselves, each other and for those we will never know yet can impact through the good of the church currently and the church eternal.
4. Encouragement, people historically as well as today have a real need to be uplifted. Speaking as someone who is pretty regularly seen as upbeat and positive, few things are more important to me than be praised or encouraged.
5. Follow through, As members of this church we have all agreed to support its mission and ministries through our prayers, our presence, our gifts and our service.

If we are committed to and are willing to share in the blessings of this congregation then we should be willing to follow through by bringing that extra umbrella, by talking about the Gospel as something too important not to share, by not only walking anywhere to preach, but by preaching everywhere we walk. By asking people to look at the lilies or the many other lessons taught by Jesus.

I want to close with a story of a young woman who was filling out a college application and was troubled when she was asked if she was a leader. Being honest she answered No, and sent the application off certain she would be rejected. Surprisingly she was sent the following reply, Dear Applicant: a review of the applications we received this year showed that our college will be admitting 1452 new leaders and we would like to admit you because we feel it is important that we have at least one follower.

You see it is not the just leaders, the Billy Grahams, the Pope John Paul's, the Mother Teresa's, the Al Pattens, Tom Walkers, Ronni Verbooms, It is any and all of us who can invite people to come and see, and to follow us toward Jesus, then we give the glory to God, the credit to Jesus, and the invitation to the Holy Spirit to finish the work we begin when we asked others to look. We don't have to be a leader to be a great evangelist. If we just follow the examples of Philip, John the evangelist, and of Jesus himself then we are simply following.

Hey I can't believe it, look, sitting all the way back there in the last pew it's one of the world's greatest evangelists.

Made ya look!