

Evangelism is a “Salvage Yard” Kind of a Word

Evangelism is a “salvage yard” kind of a word. It has been wrecked so badly and divided into parts that it is difficult for many of us to trace back to what it used to look like in first century Palestine, and therefore to understand what it can and should mean for us today.

The translation from the Greek *euangelos* means “bringing good news” according to the dictionary referenced above. Yet, notice that by 1626 (less than a century after the original Book of Common Prayer) the concepts of “winning” and “revival” had already been welded onto the original vehicle.

One might look to the earliest New Testament references in the Acts of the Apostles for clarity about the meaning of evangelism. Yet, what we find instead are bad things happening to these messengers of good news. Peter is going to jail, Stephen is being stoned, and Paul is on trial. If that is good news, then most of us would be quite content to settle for no news at all. Maybe no news really is good news?

Fortunately, the message of God in Christ is that suffering and death, in all its forms, are not final. Jesus, whose own name means “God saves,” shows that resurrection is the glorious transformation of death. The evangelistic lives of Peter, Paul and Stephen, and countless disciples since then, are testimonies to the fact that bringing this good news message can also bring about a suffering and death of its own, but most importantly, it reveals a form of life that cannot be contained or thwarted. If the good news of Christ could have been contained, it would have died as a secret among the scattered faithful in the face of early and intense persecutions of the Christian messengers.

We are called to carry this message of resurrection not only on our lips but in our lives so that this new life, this salvaged kind of life, might be made known in the world. I suppose it is fitting that evangelism be thought of in terms of a salvage yard. For our own God, that great Lover of souls who became incarnate as Jesus the Christ, exercised his earthly ministry among the wrecked souls of Galilee, transforming what was broken into something almost unrecognizably new.

In our own day, this same good news is still being brought forth because those of us who have experienced the power of Christ’s good news in our own lives cannot contain the message or our passion for sharing it with those we meet.

At the heart of this “salvage yard” word, evangelism still speaks about God’s immeasurable love in redeeming the world in Jesus. It also speaks about the imperative those who have received this gift have to share such a joyous prize with the world. And even as a “salvage yard” vehicle, it still carries the church where God leads.

Thanks be to God.