

WINTER 2009

Life IN THE SPIRIT

THE THEOLOGY OF HOPE

BY REV. NANCY COON

Like a child gazing at the sky, we can spend much of our life wishing upon that first star in the night sky. “Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight. Wish I may, wish I might, have this wish I wish tonight.” As appealing an idea as this is, it is not a Christ-centered theology, but is rather a very human and egocentric “wish” of receiving everything we ask for or desire from God.

Looking at this picture through another lens, it is theological to say that there has been and still is a “star bright” that has come into the world that was God’s plan for the repair of the world. And just as a child looking to this star, in this season of Advent, we begin to see this “star bright” in the following of the Wise Men of the star that lights up the sky over a manger in Bethlehem. This biblical narrative is a part of three liturgical seasons in our church year: Advent, Christmas, and culminating on the Feast of the Epiphany, January 6th.

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Letter FROM THE EDITOR

Evangelism. Talk about a word loaded with connotations that run the gamut. In the denomination in which I was raised, evangelism was a big deal, and I learned to have pretty negative feelings toward it. But as God has led me through many places in my faith journey, I’ve found that sharing my faith is central to who I am. I’ve found myself in the middle of evangelism along the way – how did that happen?

In this issue, we hope to take an honest look at commonly and deeply held feelings and beliefs about evangelism, as well as to push us all to rethink this central part of the Biblical call for all Christians. What are we to do, both individually and communally? How do we act with and toward others? What does the future hold? What about today?

These days, I’m much more comfortable with the whole concept of evangelizing, of sharing the Good News that continues to claim my life, my energy, my imagination, day after day. It continues to be an exciting journey, and I’m always glad for the chance to share that with others. Oftentimes God pushes me outside myself, into uncharted territory. And doesn’t that really make sense? In the words of Frederick Buechner, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” A call for us all to answer.

Blessings,

Carol Morehead

www.dsholyspirit.org

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SUNDAY WORSHIP TIMES:

8:30 a.m. *Holy Eucharist (Rite II)* - 10:45 a.m. *Holy Eucharist (Rite II) with choir*

 Please recycle by passing *Life in the Spirit* on to a friend!

The Theology of Hope


continued from page 1

This is the first evangelistic moment of the Christian faith in scripture. The Wise Men and the shepherds are “evangelized” as they see the light of Christ shining into the world to reconcile the world to God ultimately through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a story of Christian hope, a theology that accepts that the world as we know it is broken and needs the heart of God to repair it. Hope invites us to live with confidence in newness and fullness of life as God transforms and restores the world through the completion of God’s purposes for the world.

Jesus said: “I am the resurrection and the life.” Not just later, but right now. We can experience that life today and each day, so that eternal life in the Kingdom of God is not only something we are waiting for at the end of time, but something we begin living right now, each day, every day.

In the end, the message that the cross calls us to believe and trust without knowing how or why is that come what may, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ, who has promised us that everything, finally, shall be well.

Although it is human nature to wish, wishful thinking projects our present desires into the future; hope projects the future which God holds out for us towards us, both now as well as in the future. Wishful thinking moves toward the future from the present time, but hope is God’s future moving *towards us into* our present time. This theology is one of transformation that recognizes the power of God at work and which grounds itself in the long view of God’s work and purposes in the world.

The well-known 20th Century American evangelist Billy Graham said often: “I’ve read the last page of the Bible. It’s all going to turn out all right.” Certainly from a Christian perspective, it does indeed turn out and this foundational tenet of our faith is theologically defined as Christian hope – hope in God’s future for us and hope as lived out daily in God’s presence with us. 

evangelism

THROUGH THE YEARS

BY DON STEPHENSON

When many of us hear the word “evangelism” we have negative feelings due mainly to some distasteful event in our past. I know I certainly do. But, in New Testament times, it didn’t have a negative connotation. Evangelism simply meant to proclaim the Gospel or good news. The good news was the announcement of God’s kingdom and Jesus was the embodiment of that kingdom. Most of us don’t mind good news of this nature. In fact, we proclaim the good news of Jesus together every Sunday morning. So why did evangelism get such a bad reputation? As we look at the history of the church, we see where the message of evangelism has taken a back seat to improper and sometimes even corrupt methods and practices.

The early believers were anxious to proclaim the good news, but they were also fearful because they were first persecuted by the Jews and later the Romans. The Roman persecution would continue, off and on, for nearly two hundred years, but the church continued to grow. However, the climate in Rome changed drastically when Constantine (272-337) became the emperor. As the first Christian emperor of Rome he abolished all edicts dealing with the persecution of Christians. He also summoned the Council of Nicaea in 325, and he saw to it that God was properly worshiped throughout the Roman Empire. However, he got heavy handed against a schism group of Christians and sent an army of Christians to do battle with them. This was the first intra-Christian persecution in recorded history, all in the name of the Gospel.

Intra-Christian persecution seemed to be about “my” version of the good news compared to “your” version of the good news, and the version with the most power would win the day. Intra-Christian persecution blossomed into its ugly fullness during the period of the Inquisition. The Inquisition started out as an effort to root out Christian heretics and torture them back on the straight and narrow, but it turned even uglier during

the Spanish Inquisition when they started persecuting non-Christians, especially the large population of the Jewish community. In New Testament times Jews were persecuting Christians, and now it had come full circle with Christians persecuting Jews, strangely enough, in the name of the Gospel.

The Protestant Reformation had little to say about evangelism, but the eighteenth century ushered in the Great Awakening with preachers like George Whitefield and John Wesley. The Great Awakening lasted until the American Revolution, but the nineteenth century saw a continuation of the evangelistic movement with camp meetings and revivals that called for instantaneous conversions. The evangelical spirit was dampened first by the Civil War and later the Modernist/Fundamentalist debates climaxing in the Scopes Trial.

After World War II a number of denominations made evangelism their central focus, and many evangelistic preachers appeared on the scene, Billy Graham being the most notable. With the advent of television, these preachers could address a larger national audience in one broadcast than John Wesley addressed in his entire life. Most of their sermons emphasized personal redemption rather than the need for all creation to experience redemption. And the motivation for salvation centered on heaven and hell in the future, rather than good news for the here and now. In light of all this, it is no surprise that many of us have a quiver full of war stories about evangelism gone bad.

We must always keep in mind that Christians are fallible and make mistakes. But we must also keep in mind that the Greek word for “evangel” has always been translated “gospel” or “good news,” and the good news Jesus proclaimed was that the kingdom of God was with us here and now. We proclaim this in our preaching, we proclaim it together in our worship, and finally as we go out to serve. That’s good news indeed. ■

Just Smile

BY ANGIE JORDAN

When asked how I evangelize, first I cringed and then I drew a blank. It’s not like I go around handing out flyers or anything. But given my lineage (Jimmy Swaggart is my third cousin once removed) I knew that I must have it in me! So I thought a bit longer and realized that I do evangelize and I do it everyday.

Each Sunday we say the following words, “Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart.” Throughout the week I think about this everywhere. In the grocery store. At the coffee shop. As I am running. What is it at this moment that God is calling me to do? Often the answer I hear is to just smile. It’s pretty simple, smile at someone. Show them some kindness. This has become my form of evangelism. Of course, a smile can lead to many other acts of kindness, but it all starts with a smile.

So is a smile REALLY evangelism or am I just taking the easy way out? Evangelism is defined as “the preaching or promulgation of the gospel.” Ok, so I’m not on the street corner preaching fire and brimstone, but I am trying to show people “the good news.” The good news that God does exist in very real and tangible ways in the world. A world that is often times filled with angry, suspicious and apathetic people.

Maybe God is calling you to evangelize in other, even bigger ways, but I truly believe that showing kindness to someone through a smile is a great way to start.



8 Myths About the **E** Word

BY CAROL MOREHEAD

Evangelism is something that is firmly rooted in the New Testament. Yet the word itself is often laden with mixed – or even negative – reactions and connotations. Still, a central tenet of the Christian faith is the call to share the Good News – or evangelize. What to do?

Perhaps one starting place is to demythologize the concept and try to reclaim it. So here are some common myths about evangelism.

I will offend people if I share my faith with them.

At times, evangelism has been perceived only as an in-your-face, Are-you-saved? confrontation. But in studies of new Christians, one of the most common reasons given for going to a church is being invited by a friend. Most people, if they have known me very long, will know that I love red, I hate to clean house, and I'm involved in my church. If we begin to really let people know who we are, it's pretty likely that will include letting them know we follow Christ as a central part of our daily lives.

I don't want to go knock on stranger's doors.

Well, join the crowd! Not many of us like to approach strangers that way. But the models we find in scripture most often show people sharing their faith with people they know, as part of an on-going conversation and relationship.

I don't know what to say to share my faith.

In fact, most of us feel this way. That's partly because faith is sometimes hard to articulate. But practice makes perfect. When we begin to share our faith stories with one another within the community of faith, it becomes easier to share with our friends and families who are not believers. And it can be as simple as saying you'll pray for someone during a time of stress or trouble, or of being a friendly presence. Little steps are the starting point.

My faith is personal – I don't think I need to share it.

Faith *is* personal but not private. Over and over, God calls people out of their comfort zones to work in the world. As Christians, we are God's hands and feet, and God

often works in and through us to reach others. And here too, when we become comfortable with sharing among ourselves, we then begin to open ourselves in surprising new ways.

People will think I'm judging them if I talk to them about God.

Evangelism isn't about telling someone what's right. It is about sharing what you have experienced in your own life – and what difference it has made. I have a friend who used to always react with an excuse or like she felt guilty if I spoke about church activities or about prayer. She would say, "Well I know I should go back to church" or "God probably would strike me down if I ever prayed again." Because we are friends, we have had some great discussions about why she might feel that way. And I've been able to say that I don't experience God that way, and I believe she would be welcomed with open arms should she ever choose to go to a church. She knows now, feels safe enough with me, to understand that I don't judge her. Rather, I care for her and love her, and I want only good in her life, and for me that includes God.

I'm not sure if I believe in hell or that people go to hell; so why do I need to tell others about God?

Certainly a big motivator for many Christians to evangelize is the hope of heaven or fear of hell. But there are many who believe that being a Christian makes a clear difference in our day to day lives, here and now. Being a Christian means living now in the way God calls us to be, to act and react in all things as a part of God's kingdom. And if heaven or hell comes up, it's ok to have different understandings of what that might be.

I'm not good with words. Can't I just give to my church and let someone else evangelize?

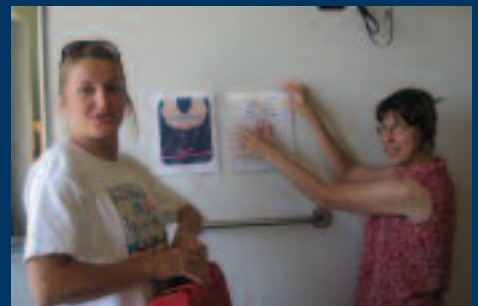
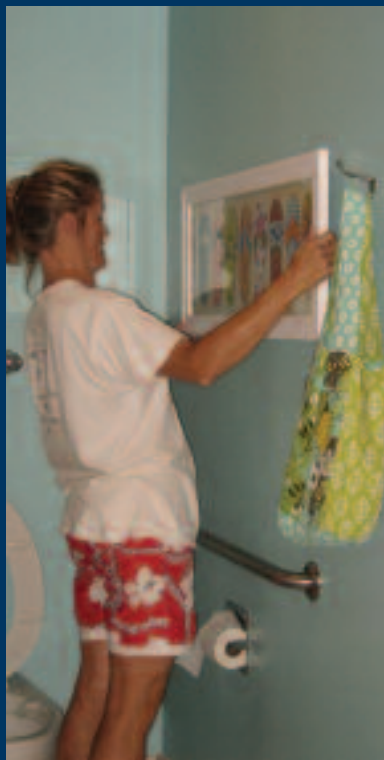
While we, as Christians, are called to share our material blessings, we are also called to share our faith. This happens in big and small ways, through our actions and our words. It isn't enough to just support the church financially; we are called to give ourselves to God every day, in all we do. How does that translate into evangelism? It means that we treat people we meet differently, that we have hope in the face of hopelessness, that we invest ourselves in the lives of those around us, that we work for a better world, that we speak about the hope we have.

That's the job of the priest or pastor.

This is a common feeling. Yet our baptism vows couldn't be clearer: we are *all* called to be evangelists, to share our faith in word and deed, day by day, hour by hour. The priest or pastor is often the face up front. But most people don't come to a church for the pastor; they come because a friend, a neighbor, a colleague invited them.

The New Testament, in the words of St. Peter, encourages us to be ready to speak about our faith: "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." (I Peter 3:15) When we accept Christ as our Lord, we *do have* hope. Now **that's** something to talk about!

EVANGELISM in ACTION



One of the many ways we can share our faith is by actively helping others. And they may never know we did it! Several members of our Mission and Service team took time out of their busy lives to paint and decorate a hospital room at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio. Now the people who will pass through those doors will enjoy a peaceful respite while hospitalized. Our team is sharing the good news without speaking a word!

RADICAL HOSPITALITY AS AN EXPRESSION OF EVANGELISM

An Interview with Elizabeth Williams

Elizabeth, you have served as the chairperson for the Openings Committee, and it is obviously one of your main interests. What exactly do you see in the working of that group which exemplifies hospitality and evangelism, even a more expressive hospitality that we call “radical”?

Openings is the title of our newcomers’ group, and our charge is to ease our visitors into the welcoming environment of the Church of the Holy Spirit. That to me means putting aside our own ‘self’, our likes and dislikes, and our individual wills in order to do God’s will. Making people comfortable when they might find themselves in a place that is perhaps uncomfortable for them is the keystone of radical hospitality. That is what we aim for in the Openings program.

Many of our guests, walking in for the first time, perhaps have had a difficult time finding the church and arriving on time, parking, releasing their children from car seats, and then encountering several well-intentioned greeters at the front door. Our job is to ease that experience by opening our hearts and minds to God’s message to welcome the stranger. It is imperative that we remove our own needs, wishes and demands to make way for others, considering their wants and needs. We ask each guest to provide us with some information, we follow up their visit with a handwritten note, and we keep records of return visits by those same people, ultimately inviting them to a newcomers’ lunch.

My hopes for visitors’ experiences is that we offer them something to come back for, that they will feel welcomed and comfortable during the worship service and perhaps sense the community of Holy Spirit.

Why are you drawn to evangelism?

I love my church and I want the world to know who we are. We can witness by simply being. We can be evangelists in the

workplace in leading by example, we can evangelize at the grocery checkout by extending a kind remark to someone in the line or behind the register. A smile is an evangelism that all of us can do regardless of our inner nature. It still astounds me



that I find myself in this role. I am an introvert by nature. I would much rather be the stranger than the welcomer. I have to believe it is God’s intent that I move from an area where I feel secure and confident and enter another where I am tentative. In fact, I am certain that it is God’s intent. It has been a challenging experience and yet a transformative one. It is God’s call to us.

Do any particular Bible stories or verses seem relevant to your evangelism?

Yes, certainly. The story of Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 18:1-15) entertaining the three angels has great appeal for me. Mary Magdalene’s anointing of Jesus (John 12:1-8) seems to be the consummate example

of evangelism. The Gospel passage “the last shall be first and the first shall be last” (Matthew 20:16) is a constant reminder to me that we are to be servants. “You may be entertaining angels without knowing it.” (Heb. 13:2) How can we envision evangelism any more clearly than those words from Scripture?

But of all the many scriptural commands to radical hospitality, it is Ephesians 1:5-12 that I find most profound. Through the grace of God and compassion of Christ, all things are possible. It is our inheritance. It is our duty and obligation as Christians to offer that same grace and compassion to those who enter our door.

You have created many pieces of art for the Holy Spirit community, including slide shows, the Pentecost origami hanging, the Advent and Lenten expressions in the sanctuary, among others. Is this a part of your personal evangelism?

I think that art and creativity constitute part of our wish to manifest the love of the Spirit, to make the Holy Spirit tangible. The Pentecost hanging represented prayer made manifest, and the congregation took ownership of it. I believe that faith expressed in art makes God present in the world. The Advent hangings represent the anticipation of the coming Christ with a little bit of Mary woven through. If these things help people to know God, if it encourages a person to pause, makes them stop and think about their faith journey, then yes, the adorning of the church can be considered evangelism.

As the Episcopal priest Sam Portaro wrote in his book *Brightest and Best*, “...evangelism. It is the assumption of the gospel, the appropriation of the gospel, into one’s life and work. The only inhibition to the full realization of the gospel, according to Jesus, is our failure to assume its truth as the operative context of our life and work.”

A Christian's Perspective on Death and Dying

BY PATRICIA HALL

What would you do if you were asked to write an article on the Christian perspective of death and dying? What if you were asked for your own personal beliefs and thoughts on this difficult issue? Hard to write—hard to read. The impediment to both is fear, coupled with our societal taboo against the discussion. Unfortunately, our society provides little support for our endeavor to face death in life. Death in our culture typically provokes fear and denial, thus we deal with death by evasion and gallows humor. However, it is my experience that if we deny death, we also deny life.

In our Christian teachings, we learn that death is an integral part of life, a mystery to contemplate. As our Book of Common Prayer reminds us, “In the midst of life we are in death.” That reality has always been part and parcel of faithful living. Our struggle as Christians is to live faithfully and to die faithfully.

What does faithful living call us to do? It calls us to love and embrace our mortal, finite life and to recognize that we cannot fend off aging and mortality forever.

My favorite poet, Mary Oliver, poses the cogent question: “What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”

The call to relish life is a hope that we hold in the face of the reality that we will eventually die. We are taught that death is the passage to a transfigured life in God. That is the hope. That is our Christian perspective.

What, then, do faithful living and faithful dying mean as we approach life's end? Not only is death an integral part of an individual's faithful life, our Anglican teachings regard death as a community event. Ours is a corporate faith. What implications does that corporateness imply for us? In essence, it mirrors the tenets of hospice care: nurturing, not curing. Dealing with the dying allows us to nurture our best humanistic tendencies. It is about honoring the spirit, it is about learning from others, it is about discovering the gifts of sacred silence, it is about listening with the heart, it is about bearing witness to the struggles of others, it is about being present to another person's pain, it is about respecting disorder and confusion, it is about going to the wilderness of the soul with another human. Our faith does not deny the hard reality of death, but it offers its followers the ability to see death as a preface to eternal life in place of contemplating and experiencing it as an inconsolable loss.

The following conditions are the most often articulated elements of a good and faithful death as described in a survey of people's parameters for their own deaths: adequate pain and symptom management, no invasive and futile procedures performed to prolong their dying, maintaining a sense of control over their own lives, representing no burden to loved ones, strengthening relationships with their loved ones. Obviously these would not represent the wishes of everyone. The more I read about end of life issues, the more I realize it is a very personal, subjective and widely disparate subject within any group. The important thing, I believe, is knowing how you want to spend your declining days and articulating those conditions to your physician in writing, and to your loved ones. The gamut is broad; one can declare that he desires

and expects all life-sustaining treatments available and appropriate or one can request only palliative care, which means a comfortable death with all treatment focusing on comfort and dignity, or one can select the middle ground, choosing some treatment forms and excluding others. These preferences form the document known as “advance directives” and are available on the Internet or from your attorney.

What about the promise of heaven, you say? That, too, is a personal interpretation. It is not easy to identify the orthodox or traditional view of heaven. If we consult historic standards of orthodoxy such as creeds and confessions, we receive little help. The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church are reticent on the subject of the hereafter; no article is devoted to heaven or everlasting life. Some believe without equivocation in the presence of an afterlife, imagining the reunion of family members in a physical form. Others conceive of heaven in a more theocentric way, less anthropocentric and more ethereal. My very personal concept of the transfigured life is one of ambiguity and mystery, not doubting but not assured of that eternal life. I am comfortable, at least for the time being, in the question.

What, then, are my personal desires for my own good and faithful death? The presence of loved ones, accomplished reconciliations if the need exists, freedom from pain, the presence of agents of pastoral care, clergy or laity, and lastly and equally important—a death that is governed by personal choices and respected human dignity. That is my right as a patient; that is my right as a child of God. 🐦

The Summer Day BY MARY OLIVER

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean—
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down—
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?



Great Ways to Teach our Children (and ourselves) How to Give Back

BY CAROL MOREHEAD

During this season, we do a lot of giving. We give thanks for our bounty and our blessings during Thanksgiving; we give thanks for the coming of the Christchild during Advent; we give each other gifts to celebrate the birth of Christ and the coming of hope to a broken world.

And often we lose focus on it all. Christ is a gift, given for all humankind, for the redemption of the world. Yet we spend much of our time and energy showering *ourselves* with stuff. What exactly are we teaching our kids? What exactly are we teaching ourselves?

Here are some ways, big and small, that we can gently shift the focus of Advent and Christmas so that our joy is showered on the world and on those in need.

- Participate in a charity that spreads good cheer to those in need. At Holy Spirit, we participate in the Helping Hands Project Elf. Soon, a Charlie Brown Christmas tree will appear in the Narthex with mittens of need on it. Take a mitten and commit to sharing your blessings with another in the DS community. Take your kids or grandkids with you to shop for the suggested gift and to wrap it.
- Spend some time during this season to evaluate what time you can commit during 2010 to a charity or service

agency. Oftentimes, volunteers will show up en masse during Thanksgiving and Christmas to serve the homeless and poor, yet the rest of the year, the need remains great. See if you can commit to serving weekly, monthly or quarterly when there are far fewer volunteers. Take on a Meals-on-Wheels route or a day to serve at Helping Hands or Caritas. Pick something that allows you to take your kids or grandkids with you.

- Pick one weekly activity, such as a coffee at Starbucks or a breakfast from fast food, and commit to foregoing it in 2010 and giving that money to a charity to help the poor and needy. Try to choose something in which the whole family can participate.
- Volunteer weekly, monthly or quarterly in a local hospital or nursing home. Most have volunteer organizations that will work with your schedule and your gifts. Many also have opportunities for all ages, including children, to volunteer.
- Commit to buying extra groceries each month to donate to Helping Hands or some other charity. Go as a family to drop off things each month.
- Save pennies in a jar for the coming year and cash them in to donate to charity.
- Commit to pray weekly for those on the prayer list and for those in need in our community. Pick a specific time each week and pray with your family or a friend.

These are just a few ways that we can look beyond ourselves and continue giving throughout the coming year. 🐦



Join us for an evening of family fun as we build gingerbread houses!

Wednesday, Dec. 2nd

6:00-7:15 p.m. in the Parish Hall
Pizza and veggies provided.

Children in the 5th grade and younger and their families are invited.

Please RSVP so we can buy the necessary "construction materials."
rsvp@dsholyspirit.org

Upcoming Events

November 29 • 9:30-10:30 a.m.
Advent Wreath Intergenerational Event

December 20 and 27 • 9:30 a.m.
Christmas Pageant Rehearsal

December 20 • Noon-1:30 p.m.
Greening of the Church with
Chili Potluck Luncheon

January 3 • 10:45 a.m.
Christmas Pageant

February 19-21
Diocesan Council Youth in Action in
Corpus Christi

Camp Capers
Mid Winter I - High School (grades 9-12)
from January 8-10

Mid Winter II - Middle School (grades 6-8)
from January 15-17

Mid Winter III - Elementary School
(8.5 years as of 1/1/10 - 5th grade) from
January 22-24