

Date: February 21, 2021 (Lent 1)

1. Texts: Genesis 9:8-17; Ps. 25:1-9; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15.
2. Subject: evangelism.
3. Topic: contextual proclamation.
4. Aim: educate.
5. Proposition: "Our proclamation has to be simple and clear, given the context of our listeners."

WHY DO WE MAKE PROCLAMATION SO HARD?

According to Mark's Gospel, the "good news of God" was easily proclaimed: "The kingdom of God has arrived, so repent and believe this message." The message was simple and clear, at least to Jesus.

Not only was the message itself simple and clear, but it seems as if Jesus' proclamation of that message was just as simple and clear. Remember, the first generation of disciples were basically everyday, not highly educated people. James, John, Simon and Andrew were working class fishermen. They might not have been able to read Hebrew and certainly would not have been trained to write it. They might not even have been able to speak Latin. So, to get people to follow him, Jesus' proclamation had to be simple and clear.

So, how is it that we modern-day disciples have made both the message and the proclamation of the message so complicated and seemingly difficult?

One reason is that today's disciples—and those of the past 300 or so years—have been trained to believe that only ordained people with loads of education should proclaim the message of Christ. The professional proclaimers have practically excluded everyday disciples from proclaiming the gospel.

Some clergy have even communicated that higher education is required to proclaim. Everyday disciples can't begin to understand the Greek and Hebraic backgrounds to Scripture. These clergy often pepper their sermons with words like "kerygma", "hermeneutics", and "apologetics". Such clergy communicate clearly that everyday disciples should leave the proclamation to those who are trained.

Of course, proclamation of the gospel of God is a risky business that requires courage. This means that most everyday disciples are quite happy to leave proclamation up to someone else.

Lastly, our culture in Canada, North America and Europe largely rejects the gospel. People label those who do proclaim as narrow-minded, intolerant and even bigoted. This complicates the process of proclamation.

Jesus' message and his proclamation were simple and clear. Ours? Not so much. Our Church has to recover some of that simplicity and clarity.

First of all, each disciple has to accept that education is not the key factor in either the message or the proclamation of that message. Now, we can't use Jesus as an example of that. True, he could read Hebrew. But his education would have been limited. However, Jesus is the source of the message—he *IS* the message, so we can't compare ourselves to him.

But we can compare ourselves to the first generation of disciples. Nearly all of them were simple, largely uneducated people. St. Paul and St. Luke were educated, but they belong to the second generation of believers who never knew the earthly Jesus. The first followers, those who were told to go out two-by-two to proclaim Jesus, were largely uneducated.

With these early disciples Jesus changed the world. You do not need to read Greek or Hebrew to proclaim the gospel. You don't need a degree or two. You do need a Bible that you can read easily. You do need to worship frequently and regularly. You do need other disciples who will support you. But you don't need a university or college education.

You will also need courage and the ability to take the risk of proclaiming the gospel. Most of your friends and neighbours will either dismiss the gospel or think that they don't need to hear it. Some will reject you for proclaiming it. Somehow, somewhere, you will have to find the courage to proclaim.

I think you may find the courage to proclaim in your love for others. You see, God has created us to know him and to enjoy his love, both in the here and now and for all eternity. But we're born with barriers to this love, barriers that

can only be overcome with a vital and life-transforming relationship of faith in Jesus. Proclaiming the good news that the kingdom of God has come near in the person of Jesus is an act of love. Surely, if you love someone, you'll want them to know God and enjoy his love for ever. Therefore, proclamation of the good news in word and deed is proof of your love.

Proclamation born out of love becomes our greatest tool in overcoming the prejudice of others. Through our words and actions we demonstrate that we are not narrow-minded, intolerant or bigoted. Our lives become the proof of the gospel. Thus, our lives help to fuel and guide our proclamation.

Mark's Gospel has this:

...Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."¹

It is so simple and clear:

1. Jesus started his proclamation at the right time.
2. His message was that the kingdom of God had arrived.
3. Because the kingdom had arrived, people should change their life's direction.
4. Because of their new life's direction, they should believe in the good news, which is that the kingdom of God has arrived in the person of Jesus.

We modern-day disciples don't need a huge education to proclaim this good news. Our experience of the faith tells us that the kingdom of God has arrived in Jesus and we have surrendered our lives to that Jesus. We are commanded to love God with all that we are and to love other people in the same way. Therefore, we can demonstrate our love by proclaiming the kingdom of God to others. It is that simple. It is that clear.

AMEN.

¹ Mark 1:15.