
You Are Good Messengers!

**A sermon by the Rev. Canon Ashley Carr
The Feast of St. Philip – Choral Eucharist**

There is a wicked side of me that loves when an Episcopal church is named St. Philip's. You see, Philip is called a deacon, yes, but did you notice the other word on the front of our bulletin today? He is also called the evangelist. This is a bad word for Episcopalians. We don't do evangelism, that's for other denominations, people who knock on doors and hand out pamphlets on street corners. It's not really our way.

At one parish where I served, I was invited to a meeting within a few weeks of arriving at the church. The email came through, Dear Ashley, we would like to invite you to a meeting on Tuesday of the communications committee. Sure, I agreed, not knowing what the committee's purpose was. At the meeting, we immediately jumped into website tracking, Facebook followers, and the font on the website. All worthy aspects of church communication. After an hour or so in these weeds, I asked the group what the point of the communications committee was. Fumbling a bit, they explained the metrics and processes and data. Fine, but what's the goal of this group, I wondered. Finally, and for the first time in that whole hour, someone said the magic word, Jesus. This faithful soul said, "we are here to tell the story of Jesus at our church."

Well, now, that I could get behind.

I said, oh, so you're the evangelism committee. Shuttering, the chair of the committee said, 'Maybe so, but we can't call it that because no one would join.'

I understood what she meant. Evangelism doesn't seem like most people's thing. We don't like to talk about Jesus. But as we sit here in this wonderful and beautiful place named for a deacon and an evangelist, couldn't we imagine ourselves telling the story of Jesus at our church and even beyond?

It's worth noting that the word evangelist means good messenger. That doesn't sound so scary. Could we be good messengers of the story of Jesus?

Philip was dedicated to the service of Jesus Christ. He was a faithful soul. And when under persecution, he was scattered, tossed out from his home, thrown into dangerous and unfamiliar territory, he could have quit. He could have said, it's just too much. This is far more uncomfortable and simply far more than I signed up for. He could have stopped right there. But because of Jesus, because of that stirring deep inside that so many of us know, he pressed on. Risking it all to be a good messenger of Jesus. He gave everything to do as Jesus told his disciples to do in that text from Matthew, he goes and makes disciples of all the nations. Telling of his experience with a loving God, promising that Jesus will always be with us until the end of the age.

Philip went and told the story of Jesus against all odds, risking reputation, family, and his life. A good messenger indeed he was.

And so, that is who we celebrate today. From dawn til dusk on this twelfth day in October, we have an evangelist on our minds and in our hearts. Every time we come to this house of prayer for all people that we call St. Philip's, we embrace a good messenger, one who told the story of Jesus and told it far and wide.

Perhaps the stakes are a bit lower for us today. Jesus remains controversial, but at least around these parts, not especially life threatening. If we tell the story of Jesus as good messengers, we risk awkward social encounters, we risk making others uncomfortable, we risk outing ourselves as believers. But we have quite a story to tell. We could tell the story of the way that music touches our souls and assures us that our God is

loving and creative so to make humans able to make such wonderful sounds. We could tell the story of a warm greeting at the door from someone genuinely glad that we are here at church. We could tell the story of the way the Tawny Port swishing in our mouths filling us up with Jesus' love. You see, there are stories to tell, good ones, stories about Jesus that require no preaching on our part, only truth telling.

Like it or not, we are evangelists. People often come to church because they're invited and because of music, but they stay because they encounter Jesus here. Maybe we should change our tag line to "come for the music, stay for the Jesus."

St. Philip's spirit dwells among us. The spirit of a good messenger and a faithful deacon who told the story of Jesus.

So, then, what's the story of Jesus that you have to tell? Go on, good messengers.