

EVANGELISM

IS WHERE ONE SEEKS TO UNDERSTAND GOD'S GOOD NEWS

AND THE ISSUES OF WORLD AND LIFE

AND TO SHARE THIS WITH OTHERS

*SO THAT THEY CAN LIVE THE LIFE
GOD HAS IN MIND*

BUT ABOVE ALL

WE MUST REMEMBER

THAT CHRIST IS OUR FRIEND

AND COMPANION

CHRIST WILL ENTER INTO FRIENDSHIP WITH US

WHEREEVER WE ARE

AS WE ARE ABLE

SO THAT WE MAY KNOW HIM AS WE NEED

AND KNOW THAT ALL OF LIFE

IS FILLED WITH GOOD AND GOD

NEVER DO WE HAVE TO BE ALONE

PARTICULARLY FOUR STORIES ABOUT HIS LIFE

ARE GIVEN US

SO THAT WE MAY KNOW HIM

IN DIFFERENT WAYS RIGHT FOR EACH

HE COMES TO US

Article on Evangelism

[What immediately follows contains the descriptions from the introductory boxes in the article which follows. These are then included here as a summary of the article, providing another way of reading it. It is hoped that the topics included will continue to provide you with insights on which to reflect.]

Evangelism is
opening the HEART to God,
understanding God in life,
and learning how to tell your
and God's story.

The world is a mixed bag,
a multiple reality in which God
and we function
and everything is not always
as God or we would wish.

In nature and history,
there is the good and bad,
but there is also God's spiritual world,
which reaches out to all we love,
who want to live from God,
from whom life was created:
as in the NT Creation stories.

The experience of the spiritual
is everywhere,
in life
in the world
and Christ is connected
with it all.
God offers the gifts of the life
of God's world.

Many see God in heaven,
full of power and judgment.
But our God joins us
in the weakness and suffering of life
and the power of LOVE.

Moravians see Christ
as Friend and Companion in life,
and the Spirit as Mother
who cares for us.

EVANGELISM involves DISCERNMENT:
understanding of God and life
understanding of you and me;
sharing of the Gospel or Good News
about what God is,
has done,
can do and would do
to provide us with the spiritual resources
of life.

It is emphasized that
whenever the Gospel is preached
the realities of God, Christ and the Spirit
become present and available – the Gospel
is the power of God for salvation, the
manifestation of the reality it describes. *The
foundational Christian experience
is then that of God/Christ/Spirit where the
companionship of God with the human heart
and spirit become central.*

*We'd like to think that history's order
is God's order
and that God could eliminate
tragedy and suffering.*

*While the New Testament is clear
that life does not go away;
in Christ
the mystery and possibility of God
is source for what can become new,
the foundation of hope.*

*To the World's most serious complication,
intentional and personal evil,
we must bring our clear intent
to let God make the world better
through us.*

Evangelism is opening the HEART to God, understanding God in life, and the telling of your and God's story.

Please know that the materials which follow are presented for young people and adults who wish to think more about their faith, to understand it, to share it, to live it. It is understood that EVANGELISM is foundationally learning how to tell not just about Jesus but about Jesus in our lives.]

The world is a mixed bag, a multiple reality in which God and we function and all is not always as God or we would wish.

The world in which we live is a composite of dynamics and realities, including nature, the sociopolitical world, human biology, -- from the mystery of world to the mystery of people -- including the mystery of illness and suffering. Though this world was often seen as controlled by gods or goddesses, after the analogy of emperors and

kings, by the time of Intertestamental Judaism and early Christianity it seemed clear that some of these forces were not always friendly and moral, but oppositional – even to God. For example, after Jesus' baptism, after the heavens were opened and the voice of God identified Jesus to himself as son of God, the Spirit of God then drove Jesus into the wilderness where he was confronted by wild beasts and angels and Satan for 40 days, a paradigm of the world dynamics to be encountered in his actual ministry. We sense that there is meaning in this perception of reality.

In nature and history, there is the good and bad, but there is also God's spiritual world, which reaches out to all we love, who want to live from God, from whom life was created: as in NT Creation stories.

And often we sense a spiritual world, somewhat as described in the Prologue to the Gospel of John, where what is in Jesus is connected with this spiritual world. The language in John 1 is from Jewish Wisdom literature and Jesus is identified as the Word/Wisdom/Mind/Reality of God in history through whom God acts. Jesus' appearances to disciples after his death (e.g. John 20-21)

resurrection of Lazarus (John 11) indicate the ongoing reality of the spiritual world which he also brings to us and shares:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. ... All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life and life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. And the Word became flesh and lived among us. From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The Law was given through Moses: grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. (1:1-5,14,16-18).

There is a similar presentation in Colossians where Paul indicates regarding Jesus:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers--all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (1:15-20)

The experience of the spiritual is everywhere, in life in the world, and Christ is connected with it all. God offers the gifts of the life of God's world.

The relationship of Christ to the spiritual world and creation is also narrated in Ephesians and, Hebrews, and which means that there is more treatment of creation in the New Testament than the Old. Oddly, though, we do not use this much even though this is very important for understanding our world and its spiritual dimensions. Often persons will share their spiritual experiences if they feel their experiences will be respected, and so we get a sense that spiritual experiences may be an important aspect of life. For the contemporary discussion of near-death spiritual experience, one

aspect of experience of the spiritual world, see Kenneth Ring, *Heading Towards Omega: In Search of the Meaning of the Near-Death Experience*, NY: William Morrow and Co., 1984. I have also walked through death with family members and provided pastoral care in the dying of congregational members. And there are also experiences of the spiritual which occur in the process of and struggle with life, when God/Christ/Spirit seem near as described in the early church. It is interesting that similar experiences are often described differently, but that is in the nature of life and our attempts to understand and describe. To see the way spiritual gifts are described in the NT is an interesting way to illustrate this. In I Cor. 12 Paul indicates that there are varieties of spiritual gifts but they are given by the same Spirit, serve the same Lord, and God activates them in all. In Ephesians 4 it is the resurrected Christ who gives spiritual gifts and in I Peter 4:10-11 it seems to be God who sends the gifts. Thus in a number of ways the richness of the spiritual gifts of God are described and people don't experience them all the same.

Many see God in heaven, full of power and judgment. But our God joins us in the weakness and suffering of life and the power of LOVE.

One of the very significant elements of NT thought about God is that God is not far off, God is not just in heaven separated from us and the experience of real life, but in Christ God enters the real world in which we live, experiences limits, and suffers (and I intentionally do not just use past tense). The cross is the great symbol of that. In Col. 1:20 Paul says "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by

making peace through the blood of his cross." That it is difficult to reverence a God who suffers is clear in I Cor. 1:18, for how can a God who suffers help us escape our suffering: "For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God." And in II Cor. 11-12 Paul describes his own suffering and the struggle of his thorn in (or "of") the flesh where God's grace was sufficient for him and "power was made perfect and completed in weakness" – and God refuses to be primarily a God of power but is a God of love and incarnation, sharing life's reality. The conclusions to the ending of Mark in Mark 16 show how the early church struggled with this. In the first ending, 16:1-8, the angel indicates to the women at the tomb that Jesus is raised and that he will again be present and lead his disciples within the world as he did before (like a shepherd leads his sheep – see also 14:27). However, in the 60s the war between the Jews and Romans took place, Jerusalem was destroyed, and Christians were persecuted by the Emperor Nero. Then some in the early church added vs. 9-20 as a second ending which described powerful resurrection appearances of Jesus, the handling of demons, drinking poison, and the handling of snakes --- and the resurrected Jesus then went to heaven rather than staying down here to lead his disciples as before. The ambiguity of this caused some of the early church to see Jesus as having gone to heaven and staying there -- and the present God being expressed in the Holy Spirit.

Moravian view of Christ, Spirit

It is interesting that Moravians in the 18th century saw Jesus as very loving, very close and involved in their life.

Thus they saw him as the Companion in life of all persons (often painted as present with church groups even if they often talked about him as in heaven) and as Chief Elder of the Moravian Church, helping it to make its decisions and leading it into mission. And the Spirit was seen as loving Mother, caring for the Church. There was even a special festival for the Spirit as Mother. God was not so much a God of power, but of Presence and Love, and the richness of God experience caused this to be defined in a number of ways, quite natural since there was variety. This is really a special gift when we recognize that there are many legitimate forms to religious experience and different persons have different needs. Moravians believed that Christ and the Spirit work with individuals in individual ways according to their needs and mission.

In the light of all this, what is EVANGELISM?

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It is emphasized that
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*The foundational Christian experience
is then that of God/Christ/Spirit where
the companionship of God with the
human heart and spirit become central.***

It is often not so much an experience of the intellect, though the intellect may play a significant role, but of the **HEART** where even the infant in the womb can know Jesus (Luke 1:44). Thus in the 18th century Moravian Church there were “Choirs” (a group defined for spiritual direction) for embryos. Thus we indicate that we baptize infants because they already experientially know Jesus. We also respect the spirituality of the elderly who truly know God without having to remember all the details.

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and that God could eliminate
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**While the New Testament is clear
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in Christ
the mystery and possibility of God
is source for what can become new,
the foundation of hope.**

As human beings whose life is somehow bound up with God, there are times that we can’t quite figure out God and questions are raised about God’s possible failure to care for the world (such as the tragic deaths of 150,000 persons from Tsunami waves). Our thinking about God will often follow conventional ideas about kings and emperors, which is frequently our model for God. In the Old Testament there is the Law of Moses which presents God’s promises and requirements which God gave to Moses to help Jews with the problems of life and to know how to satisfy God. The Law of Moses became the subject of study and

interpretation for centuries, giving birth to the Talmud and giving order and moral quality to those who practiced it. The Roman world had its equivalents to the requirements of the Law: namely what the Romans called “elementals” of the Roman world, mentioned by Paul and often

involving philosophical systems of the ancient world or the spiritual world behind the physical world, perspectives which helped Romans understand and cope with their world.

But the Jewish Law and Roman elementals are not the real answers to life for they only transform peripherals and not the essence of the person. Paul speaks in a very profound way of how dying to and giving up the way of the Jewish Law and having faith in Christ gives birth to a new inner reality:

For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:19-20)

Paul stressed that there was more needed than advice and explanations, more needed than laws and regulations, more than elementals. *The “more needed” Paul identified with the person of Christ who embodies all and has knowledge of God’s mystery. In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and the reality which is God.* What you begin to get a sense of is that we so often put all the emphasis on ways of getting help with life, but miss what is most important, that in Christ himself there are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and the transformative and enabling realities needed. *Very simply, when you have Christ you have everything and when you have Christ the full mystery and possibility of God is there. To rephrase it in God language, as with Christ when you have God you have everything God has.* Thus if you only want to know about God rather than to know God and only to know about Christ rather than to know Christ, you are missing the most important gifts God and Christ have to offer. Life is transformed by the inner spiritual realities.

As Paul indicates in Col. 1:11-20

May you be made strong with all the strength which comes from his glorious power...giving thanks to God who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.... He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, ...all things have been created through and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn of the dead so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and though him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

To the World’s most serious complication, intentional and personal evil, we must bring our clear intent to let God make the world better through us.

Paul clearly knows that you cannot settle everything merely by knowing all the rules and following them, even though he was once a scholar of the Jewish Law. While it is true that he calls upon people to do some of the things the Law asked of the Jews and the elementals asked of the Romans, now Paul suggests they should put on Christ and love. He

clearly knows Christ who is the ultimate source of life: the one who is the reality of the mystery of God. What we ultimately get to is that you cannot solve life without the One who is the Source of life. But there is also a “complication” in life. There are a number of things wrong with the world partially due to the many complex factors of life, but also due to a personal force called the Devil/Satan who embodies and intends evil. In Jewish tradition he was regarded as a fallen angel. Thus we have Jesus, the person who brings to us all that is “good and God,” and we

have a person diametrically opposed to God, the Devil. Thus the struggles of life can often seem to be not just incidental or natural but interpersonal, intentional, planned. To raise the question of the reality of Satan may be somewhat difficult as we may not wish to see that type of conscious oppositional reality in life, informed by intention and decision. Yet in life the community of God's people and God's spiritual world help to protect from this. In the story of Jesus' baptism he was sent into the wilderness and tempted/tried by Satan for 40 days and cared for by God and God's angels (also a part of God's spiritual world). Thus we live experiencing the dynamics not just of forces but of persons, Christ and the Devil, and to deal with persons makes it a different and more difficult sort of struggle. In much of the short period of Jesus' ministry, and the mission he advocated for his disciples, the struggle with the Devil or unclean spirits was lived through. Thank God for God who has assumed the primary responsibility for helping us deal with this and is always with us.

Life Is

Life is
an experiment
to discover
what is there
and how
it might be lived,
with passion.

It's hardly worth
the effort
to merely endure,
to live without some love
for living.

Once others told us
what was there,
and we believed
until
it did not all come true.

Then we began
to learn, unlearn,
unname what for us
they named, perhaps with
love.

Much less we knew,
but more we know:
life's mystery,
and You.

You were there,
and heart could know
what mind
could not name.

How quickly
we make into **it**
what really is **Thou**
and seek to own,
control, what cannot,
must not, mastered
be, and like we
pleads for freedom.

How good
to live, to see and hear,
to feel life's passions,
and to somehow touch
an other. How good
to live and enter the
mystery
both of world,
and other.

I would not
have missed it
for the world,
for the world, ever.

Just to have been
with pain and passion,
to drink deep the lives
of those I've loved,
to bear within
their stories,
to be recalled
in dream and hope
again.

O what a gift.
And you, O God,
You're worth
whatever is endured.

