

## Newsletter Reflections for June

The evening before the April Presbytery Meeting, held as usual at Montreat, a workshop with the topic of Evangelism was announced. The speaker was the Rev. Dr. Ray Jones, Acting Director, Theology Formation & Evangelism with the Presbyterian Mission Agency of the PCUSA. I attended for several reasons; some good; some not so worthy. (Admittedly the not so worthy it meant I was spending the night at William Black so I did not have to drive up to Montreat at such an early hour in the morning to be on time for the Presbytery Meeting.) However, the information in the flyer about the topic was very intriguing. The word evangelism literally comes from the Greek word meaning good news. The history of the word relates it to the bringing and sharing of the good news of Jesus Christ. That is surely something that we all should be eager and able to do. But somehow, we have lost that biblical understanding of this word so deeply rooted in our scriptures. It is that understanding which sent the early believers out with such joy with their message which spread so rapidly. I firmly believe that we are called to be disciples of Christ. That we should claim this---not as folks that use that as a label, but as ones who are living example of activities which demonstrate that we have received that good news —acting out discipleship—being bearers of the good news by the things we say and do. And I would hope doing that joyfully, because the gift of grace we have received IS good news. The information distributed about the discussion to be held by Dr. Jones under the “why” this discussion was being held stated: “We Presbyterians, the “frozen chosen,” are notorious for being awkward and uncomfortable when it comes to fulfilling the Great Commission and other things.” Part of that can be attributed to the influence of Puritanism, but not all of it comes from that. Some of it comes from the way that the term has been separated from the biblical roots of bringing good news. The term evangelical has become associated closely with political views in our culture which have proclaimed an identity with religion, but are not necessarily about proclaiming the good news of God’s love and grace. And my observations have not found much joy being spread through their efforts. So this seemed like an opportunity for a refresher on the subject of evangelism—a rediscovery of how evangelism can be done according to the original definition found under Dr. Jones’ approach. This approach is evangelism is done through exploring the nature of the biblical community and the ways of discipleship which leads to a more authentic way of sharing faith and being part of God’s mission to the world. So in practical terms, what does this mean about where and how we should be doing evangelism and what biblical evangelism looks like in the world today? To begin with, any evangelism that a faithful community of disciples does should be doing should be gospel centric—based on the mandates found in scripture. This can only be done through careful study of the teachings of Jesus Christ. This year is the lectionary cycle C which focuses on Luke’s gospel where Jesus proclaims in 4: 18—“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of

the Lord's favor." This is a reading from the Isaiah scroll at the beginning of Jesus' ministry and lifts up a thread which runs throughout all of the Hebrew and New Testament scriptures about God's concern for justice. Next year, the gospel of Matthew will be the source of the gospel readings. It has also been chosen as a focus for the PCUSA to study as a denomination what it means to be a Matthew 25 community: a community whose focus is on the restoration, reconciling and redeeming work that we are called to participate in as disciples of Christ. This is perhaps another place where we should seek some wisdom from the meanings of the words we use. Jesus gathered disciples in order to teach them. Disciples were those who were taught. Once they were sent out they became apostles—those sent. It seems that we need to go back to the source—to study more closely what Jesus taught about what the reign of God was to be like—and in that way be truer disciples. Perhaps if we do a better job of listening to what scripture reveals about God's desire for the community of gathered people living in covenant relationship actually looks like then being joyful bearers of good news would be easy.

Shalom,

Pastor Libby