

Isaiah 40:21-31
Psalm 147:1-12, 21c
1 Corinthians 9:16-23
MARK 1:29-39

“Let *us* go on.”

Peter said to Jesus, “Everyone is searching for you.” In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Peter had no idea of the full truth of the words he uttered to Jesus very early on in their relationship: “Everyone is searching for you.” Jesus had caused an immediate sensation in Peter’s home town with a rapid succession of healings, both public (in the synagogue in Capernaum) and private (of Peter’s mother-in-law in his home), both individual and *en masse* – “the whole city” gathered around the door of Peter’s house with those who were sick with “various diseases.” In Jesus God’s muscular love was making a “beachhead” in God’s invasion of the world God had made, an initial landing and battle against all that sickens, degrades and diminishes human beings in a small town in Galilee at the fringe of the Roman Empire.

Even overnight the news of Jesus’ spectacular ministry had spread, so that when Jesus went out to pray alone in the pre-dawn darkness, Peter and his companions “hunted for him,” Mark says. Yes, Jesus would be “hunted for” later on as well, but not by his friends.

Jesus’ response after they interrupted his solitary prayer was, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for this is what I came out to do.” It was his purpose on earth to proclaim the message in word and deed that “The Kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe in the Gospel.” His deeds were a crucial part of his proclamation. As St. Francis of Assisi would say over 1,200 years later, “Preach the Gospel constantly, if necessary, use words.”

Note also that Jesus said, “**Let us** go on.” He was not alone in this evangelizing. He still is not.

The very first evangelizing – literally, spreading the Good News – by Jesus was done in a hilly backwater of the country among working class folks far from the local power centers of Jerusalem or Caesarea and very far from Rome. This first evangelizing was done in the language known as Aramaic, the language which was commonly used in the Holy Land in the First Century since Hebrew had become already a religious language and an ancient language, not one for ordinary daily life for people without specialized educations.

We can catch some of Jesus’ *actual* (as opposed to translated) words in Mark’s Gospel more than anywhere else in the New Testament. In Mark 5:41, Jesus says to the daughter of Jairus, “Talitha cum,” Aramaic for “Little girl, get up” – and she was restored to life after she had died. In Mark 7:34, Jesus says to the man who was a deaf/mute,

“Ephphatha”, meaning “Be opened” – “and immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.”

Jesus’ ministry had to start among his own people, the Jewish people, who had been God’s own people since the time of Abraham nearly 2,000 years before Jesus. But because Jesus’ coming answered – and answers – a hunger in the hearts of billions of people, not just hundreds, Jesus’ ministry did not stop with his fellow Jews. During his ministry before his crucifixion there were only glimmers of what was to come – a Roman army officer coming to Jesus to ask for healing for his servant, “some Greeks” coming to the disciple Philip in John 12 with the historic request, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”

After Easter, how would Jesus’ followers reach out to those who “wished to see Jesus”?

The Holy Spirit gave a really obvious clue on the Day of Pentecost, just seven weeks after Easter and ten days after Jesus’ ascension into heaven. That day, Jesus’ followers were temporarily empowered to speak about him in a host of different languages to Jewish pilgrims from many countries who were in Jerusalem for the festival commemorating God’s gift of the Ten Commandments.

And when even more people who did not know the Aramaic language wished to know about Jesus Christ, and the Christian community realized it had to add communicating via writing to communicating by word of mouth, the first books of the New Testament – Paul’s letters – were written in *Greek* so that more people could hear, understand and, in the words of John 20:31, “So that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”

That was just the beginning.

For the first 300 years after Easter, the only way Christianity made converts was by winning hearts and minds, for there were no Christian armies. That would come later, when Christianity won converts sometimes because of and sometimes in spite of the behavior of those who brought the faith to new lands. But all Christian evangelists save Jesus himself were and are imperfect. God was willing to work with them – and God is willing to work with us.

The Good News of Jesus Christ has been spread through countries and entire continents which Peter didn’t even know existed. The roots of our faith, of course, are Middle Eastern. The first convert from another continent was the Ethiopian eunuch, whose baptism was recorded in Acts 8:38. The Ethiopian church continues to be strong as well as unique to this day. The next continent to be reached was Europe, the focus of so many of Paul’s letters and travels once he made it beyond Asia Minor.

Eventually, the Bible was translated into Latin to reach those in Western Europe who did not know Greek. Then, in the wake of the spectacular catastrophe of the fall of the Roman Empire in the West in the 5th Century, the Christian Church found itself to be not only the bearer of the faith to a flood of barbarians, but the bearer of Western civilization to the illiterate. The evangelization and the education of this radically transformed Europe was undertaken by a variety of people. In the West, Irish monks

brought the faith and writing and books of many kinds to places in Western Europe which had lost all three.

In the East, - well, let's look at the little church calendars we hand out. This coming Saturday, February 14, we don't have Valentine's Day on the church calendar, but Cyril and Methodius, two brothers from Constantinople (modern day Istanbul in what is now Turkey) who journeyed into Eastern Europe in the 9th Century to preach the Gospel – also, to people who didn't speak Greek as Cyril and Methodius did.

Constantinople was the most civilized and advanced Christian city in the world in the 9th Century, and the brothers could have looked down snobbishly at those they traveled to. Instead, they listened to the Slavic language they heard, created an alphabet for it – ever heard of the Cyrillic alphabet in which Russian is written? – preached in the language and started translating the Bible into this newly-written down language and new alphabet.

Anyone complain about having to take two years of High School Spanish?

Ever since, when the Christian church has done things right, it *listens* to the people and brings the Good News of Jesus Christ into their world, their language, their culture to bring them closer to God's vision for them. Christians have not always understood what are the core elements of the Christian faith and what are their own particular cultural trappings, so sometimes often well-intentioned Christian missionaries have been cultural as well as political imperialists.

But the Gospel of Jesus Christ is able to live and breathe despite the failings of those who have spread it. So it is that, within our own Episcopal Church, if you look for the area of the United States with the highest concentration of Episcopalians as a percentage of the population, you will find them in western South Dakota. Anybody know who lives there? Right, we're talking about Sioux Indian reservations. Are the Sioux Christians because all the white Christians they met in the 19th Century were wonderful to them? No, they are Christians because they have come to know and love Jesus Christ in part in spite of the first Christians they met.

So, today, the Christian faith is lived in hundreds of languages in over a hundred countries around the globe. We celebrate our marvelous diversity at St. Barnabas and even more wondrous unity every week, but especially today, on International Sunday. Truly, God has the whole world in his hands. Truly, we are all God's servants. And truly, we can all be *evangelists* receiving the Good News of Jesus Christ into our lives and sharing the Good News with others, who are looking for meaning, purpose, healing, hope and community.

The late, great Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, defined evangelism as “the presentation of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit so that seekers are led to put their trust in God, accept Christ as Savior, and serve Him as Lord in the fellowship of the church.”

Not a single one of us would be Christians if there had not at some point been someone who, however, imperfectly, evangelized us or our people.

Today, people are searching. The false “god” of materialism has come crashing down in pieces all over the world. People are anxious, exhausted, worried, hungry. To

them, and to us, God says in today's first reading, "Those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." God is the only inexhaustible resource for our lives. Not money, not government: God.

People need to hear this.

Today, people are searching. Several years ago a newcomer said to me, "I knew something was missing in my life, and then I realized it was Someone: Jesus Christ." She came, she saw, she was baptized, she stayed, she grew as a Christian. There are others who know that "something is missing" who may not yet know *who* is missing from their lives. We can invite them to "come and see."

Peter said to Jesus, "Everyone is searching for you." Jesus said to him – and to us - "Let *us* go on."

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