

Third Sunday after Pentecost, 2016
All Saints Episcopal Church, San Leandro
The Rev. Justin R. Cannon
175 Days of Evangelism

You will find as you get to know me that rarely will I do much of anything thoughtlessly. Intentionality is very important to me. I believe one of the responses to recognizing that we are on a spiritual journey is to bring a deep sense of mindfulness or intention into all that we do—the words we speak, how we treat others, how we spend our time, talent, and treasure, and for me this principle of intentionality extends into every sermon I give, every liturgy I prepare, and even how I approach your texts and emails. One reason I share this is because I was very intentional about what I preached my first Sunday with you here at All Saints, on January 10th, which for me feels like forever ago. I don't know if you remember the sermon or not, but in short it was about me being called here to equip you as the saints of God for the work of ministry. I was even daring enough to use not the f-word, but the e-word in that first sermon. Yes, the e-word evangelism. I will not venture to echo myself and share a brief excerpt from that sermon, for very intentional reasons:

To be a minister of the gospel, in part is to be an evangelist. Yep, I dropped the e-word in my first sermon, but I don't mean evangelist in the bible-banging, hellfire-preaching, proselytizing kind of way. I mean evangelical in the sense of bringing good news to a world where every newspaper I pick up seems to be filled with bad news—violence, ecological disaster, corruption, scandal, and the scars of a world longing for healing.

The word evangelical has ancient roots and comes from a Greek word that just means “announcement of something good” – or “good news.” We translate this Greek word as gospel, but that really just means good news. There is good news that we have to share with the world, and I believe we live in a world hungering for this news. The Good News is of a love story between God and humanity. The Good News is woven throughout the Eucharistic Prayer you will hear just minutes from now. I invite you as we pray to consider the prayer afresh, to listen to it as if you were hearing it for the first time—or perhaps as if it were your last time to hear these words. It is the story of a God who loves us so much that God the Infinite, God the Timeless, God the Eternal entered into the bounds of space and time to walk among us, to teach us, to love us, and to show us the way to healing and life. If this is true—then that's pretty good news. More than good, that's insanely amazing news!

Today's scripture lessons offer wonderful glimpses of that Good News—in the Old Testament account the prophet Elijah raises a young boy from the dead, a reading which parallels the Gospel lesson of Jesus raising a woman's only son from the dead. There both testify to the power of life and love over death and despair. Rather than commanding you to go forth from this place and seek to raise the dead—I see in these accounts a glimpse of God's power that still speaks to us today in manifold ways. Bringing forth life out of the looming shadow of death can be as simple as providing food through our food pantry to a family struggling to make ends meet. Bringing forth life out of the looming shadow of death can be as simple as providing a shower, warm meal, and clean clothes to someone through April Showers that might get them through a

possible job interview. Or it could simply mean being a community like All Saints that embraces you when your home life is rocky and the entirety of your life feels like it's coming apart at the seams. Bringing forth life out of the looming shadow of death can be as simple as an invitation into a community that will embrace you and your family when half the churches in town condemn you because of your sexual orientation, gender identity, or various beliefs you hold or don't hold.

There is something special going on here at All Saints and we cannot keep it all to ourselves. There is work to be done to ensure that this legacy of All Saints—those red doors that open wide to a vibrant and welcoming community—continues for generations. In our baptismal covenant we are asked, “Will you proclaim by *word and example* the Good News of God in Christ?” and we all respond, “I will with God’s help.” We need to reach out beyond these walls not just in fulfillment of our baptismal covenant, but to ensure the future of this beloved community that it may be a refuge, a safe and welcome space, a vibrant community for the next generation and generations to follow.

Last year seven members of All Saints passed away, venturing on to the heavenly courts and since I was called here in January I’ve already presided over three memorials. We have a remarkable GOOD NEWS to share, and it is my hope over the next year that for every member who continues their journey beyond that we might welcome two new members who begin their spiritual journey with us at All Saints. Not just to introduce them to the radical Good News of the Gospel, but to ensure the legacy of this sanctuary for generation to come. And this involves evangelism—sharing the Good News. Active invitation to strangers and neighbors.

And so, as there are 175 days between now and the end of this liturgical year, I declare for All Saints Episcopal Church, 175 Days of Evangelism. A lot, my friends, can be done in 175 days. In fact, in 1924 US Army airmen accomplished the first flight around the entire world, three years before Lindbergh’s famous solo flight. If they can circle the world in 175 days, we can spread a radical welcome throughout the City of San Leandro in the same and that is the challenge I lay before us as a community for which I know there are people hungering, on a spiritual, emotional, or social level.

And these 175 days before us are not without great opportunity to reach out, to welcome, to invite, and to grow more fully and deeply into our call to be evangelists—those who spread the Good News. Yesterday I met Thomas LaFrance and Mary Orin at the church at 7:30am as we packed Mary’s truck to go to the San Leandro Cherry Festival, where we promoted our Food Pantry sharing a table with April Showers. Thomas and I manned our booth there from 8am until 6pm and were joined throughout the day by Robert, Chike, Donna, Kathleen and others who helped at the booth throughout the day. We passed out 100s of flyers and collected more than two pages of emails from people interested in volunteering and desiring more info on these ministries. It was a phenomenal way to kick-off these 175 days, while at the church 32 volunteers from age 3 to 92 showed up at the Food Pantry to give food to over 100 guests – reaching 328 household members. The food pantry was also blessed with an overabundance of more than 500 bagels and breads—all given to those in need.

These 175 Days of Evangelism will be replete with opportunities to reach out where we need you to be the face of All Saints. Next Sunday we will commemorate Tierra Sagrada—Sacred Earth Sunday, which is a wonderful occasion to invite a friend. The following Sunday will be Father's Day when you can bring your dad to church for a Father's Day blessings—and also invite your neighbors to do the same. From July through October, every month we will have opportunities to reach out to our community, but we cannot do this without your help, so the burden of a whole day doesn't fall on a small handful of people. [pass out flyer] – please Save the Date for these events and plan to be there if you can. Today at coffee hour we will be signing up people for 2-hour time slots for Castro Valley Pride, which will be July 9th. Whether you are gay or straight or somewhere in between you can be a strong presence at our booth showing the inclusive and radical love of the Gospel. August there is National Night Out hosted here at the church, which is a great way to reach out to our immediate neighborhood. Come September we will have a booth at the Oakland Pride Festival, which draws almost 50,000 people. And in October, if we can find a leader for the event, we would love to have a presence at the annual Sausage & Suds Musical Festival in Downtown San Leandro.

And most importantly, the most powerful witness and invitation comes from one-on-one encounters, which is why we have more invite business cards for each of you. And I ask you to please email me stories when you give these to people or leave them places and I will publish these stories on our Facebook, the newsletter, or Take Along as encouragement for one another as we embark on this journey of an intentional outreach to our community. Go forth, share the Good News, invite the lonely, the hungering, and seekers of San Leandro and beyond. We have some amazing news to share!

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