

Kerygma

A sermon preached at Niles Discovery Church, Fremont, California,
on Sunday, May 1, 2022, by the Rev. Jeffrey Spencer.

Scripture: [Acts 5:27-32](#)

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Peter and the other disciples – they had a story to tell. They saw their story as amazing, good news. Their experiences with Jesus as they wandered the Judean countryside had changed their lives. It had never been simple. They didn't always understand what Jesus was talking about. They weren't always clear about what Jesus wanted from them. Sometimes what he said upset the people in power.

And then things came to a head. Jesus came into the capitol and started poking the bear. Five days later, Jesus was under arrest and would almost certainly be executed. On the sixth day he was killed. And they buried him.

It was over, or so they thought. But God had another idea. I don't know how to explain what happened on the following Sunday. I can't explain the resurrection. And still, I know for sure that the disciples experienced *something*. I know that the disciples experience the presence of Jesus, and I know that they experienced the presence of God the way they had experienced the presence of God in Jesus when they were wandering the Judean countryside.

And that sense of the presence of the divine didn't go away. It came as a rush of wind and as tongues of fire. On Pentecost, the disciples were transformed into apostles. They were not just disciples – not just students of Jesus. They became messengers of Jesus. They had a story to tell, a story that they experienced as good news. And so they shared it.

And when they shared it, they got into trouble. We skipped the part of the story our reading comes from where the apostles got arrested, had an angel-led jail break, and got right back to telling their story. Maybe the fact that they got into trouble with the people in power gave them the sense that they were saying the right things. After all, the people Jesus got in trouble with were the people in power.

Jesus did just fine with the common folk. In fact, they followed him in the hundreds and thousands into the wilderness, just to hear what he had to say. And now, the disciples had huge crowds listening to them and choosing to become part of their community. Their story about Jesus, their story about their experiences from his life, his death, and his resurrection moved other people, too. And ever since then, the Jesus movement has had the vocation that in Greek is called *kerygma*.

The Greek word, *kerygma*, is probably best translated as *proclamation*. And that's exactly what the disciples/apostles were doing. They were proclaiming their story, their good news. And in the telling of their story, they invited people into the story, into the good news, and to make the story their own.

Don't miss that term I used: *good news*. There's a Greek word for that, too. *Evangel*. When they proclaimed their good news, when they proclaimed their *evangel*, the apostles were being evangelical.

That is another way to understand this ancient vocation of the early church. *Kerygma* is the church's call to proclaim. And the *evangel*, the good news, is what they were proclaiming.

During the month of May, we're looking back at the five historic vocations of the early church. We're looking back so we can step forward. In looking at these historic vocations, we're asking ourselves, "What does this vocation look like for a progressive Christian church in the 21st century?" There's an assumption in this question. Pastor Brenda and I are assuming that the church never lost these five original vocations, these five original vocations of the early church. We could be wrong. It may be that the church of today is no longer called to fulfill these ancient vocations. I don't think so, but we could be wrong. If we're not wrong, I know for sure that some of the ways the church has lived out these vocations over the centuries have been unfaithful.

Take, for instance, the vocation of *kerygma*. Some of the ways the church has proclaimed what is supposed to be good news has been anything but. In the early 19th century, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (which was largely Congregationalist) sent missionaries to Hawaii to proclaim the good news of Jesus. In the process, they and their descendants decimated Hawaiian culture and overthrew of sovereign Hawaiian government. That was not exactly good news for the Hawaiians. I certainly don't want to live out the vocation of *kerygma* like that.

I've also experienced hyper-judgmentalism from well-meaning Christians who think they are living out the vocation of proclamation. And not once have I experienced what they've had to say as good news. And, to be honest, I think a lot of their theology sucks. On Thursday, at the clergy gathering held the day before the Christian Church of Northern California-Nevada Region's annual meeting, one of my colleagues wore a t-shirt that said, "Bad Theology Kills." It does. Theology that condemns and de-persons children of God, especially when it's proclaimed as good news, can be deadly. I certainly don't want to live out the vocation of *kerygma* like that.

There is so much about evangelical proclamation that is bad, we in the progressive wing of Christianity are more like Jonah than Amos. When God calls us to proclaim the good news, we hop on a boat and try to get away. But what if we didn't try to get away? What if we took the vocation of *kerygma* seriously? What would it look like?

To be honest, I don't know. All I have for you today are some beginning thoughts. First, I think the vocation of *kerygma* is both a personal and a corporate vocation. Each of us individually has a story to tell, a story that is good news to us personally. We are each called to proclaim that story. And, I think we as a community, we as a congregation have good news to share.

I'm glad that this vocation was the first we're looking at in this series because in half an hour or so, we're going to have our Annual Meeting, and for the first time in a couple years, we have someone who has volunteered to be the chair of our Ministry of Evangelism Team. Because our Ministry of Evangelism Team has been dormant for two years, it's completely free to reinvent itself. There are some guidelines in our bylaws about this Ministry Team, which are pretty loose. So, this Ministry Team can focus – well, on anything that helps our church share the good news we know. The door is wide open. And you are

welcome to step through and help this Team create its future. Reach out to Cindy Sojourner if you're interested.

It seems to me that one of the early things we need to do to fulfill our calling to *kerygma* is to figure out how to express the good news we know. While Peter's proclamation in today's scripture reading focuses on the death of Jesus, I think our focus needs to be somewhere else. One of the places I find good news is in Luke 4, when Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah. "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." (Luke 4:18-19)

If what we have to say isn't good news for people who are poor, then I don't think it's Jesus' good news. And if it is good news for the poor, there may be people in power who don't like what we have to say. That doesn't mean we should hush up our story!

Someone once told me that the big choice is between hope and cynicism. It seems to me that cynicism is often a buffer against commitment. Hope, on the other hand, is a choice you make, a decision. My hope is prompted by my faith and my faith's foundation is my encounter with God, with the Holy, with the divine. My faith prompts my hope. My hope leads to action. And I act to bring about change.

So here are the questions that I think we need to answer as our next step or steps:

1. What is your/our good news story?
2. What are some ways you/we can share that good news?
3. With whom can you/we share that good news?
4. What's getting in the way of your/our sharing it?
5. What would help you/us overcome that obstacle?

I'd say, "Amen," but this sermon isn't over. We need to finish it together.