

“Who Brings You Good News?”
Ephesians 4:4-13; Acts 2:36-47;
Matthew 4:18-22; Luke 6:12-16

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This summer we have been working our way through the stained glass windows. We started with the windows along the east side of the sanctuary. Today, we are going to talk about the two windows up front, on either side of the chancel. These windows depict St. Peter and St. Paul, so we will do Peter and Paul together. We have the rest of the day to talk about these two people, right? Because we could do that; we could spend the rest of the day talking about all that went on in these two people’s lives. But I’m going to assume you didn’t plan to spend quite the whole day here, so I’ll try not to take the whole day.

These two folks are very different. We didn’t really read Paul’s calling story, but we did read Peter’s. Peter was a fisherman along the Sea of Galilee who decides he will follow Jesus. It seems he just drops his nets and goes. Paul is a little different. We don’t really find out right away if we are reading about Paul, but if we read all the way through Acts, we find out he is actually a Roman citizen. Right there, there is a huge status difference between Peter and Paul.

The other thing we might note about Paul is that he never really was a disciple of Jesus like Peter was. He didn’t walk the roads with Jesus. In fact, he was trying to persecute the church. These new Christians were terrible folks in his eyes because they were perverting the Judaism that he believed in. Then one day Paul was on his way to Damascus and encountered a bright light and the voice of Christ, who asked him, “What are you doing to my people?” Paul asked, “Who are you?” Jesus introduces himself, and from that Paul is completely changed and becomes one who brings that change to his ministry. Initially he has to escape Damascus in a basket because the people he used to be chums with now see him as a betrayer. He has joined the other side, the new way, the Christians.

So, while these guys are pretty different, there is one way that they are similar. We might note it initially for Paul. We talked about the idea that he was a persecutor. The description in the bulletin says that the three circles in the middle of the window are fountains. Another person who looked at them said they looked like rocks. Paul was at the stoning of Stephen. He held the coats of the people who stoned Stephen. On the other window, there is a rooster—the cock that crowed when Peter betrayed Jesus three times. I don’t know that I would want my worst actions memorialized with me, but that’s kind of what we’ve done there. And it feels a little bit that way with Paul as well. One of the ways they are similar is that they both had something that they had to confess: a

betrayal, or a kind of betrayal with persecution. Out of those confessions and the forgiveness that God gives through Christ, they were changed and they were able to be apostles—Peter returning to the apostleship that Jesus had given him, and Paul becoming one.

Even though they were both apostles, they stayed different, because one became an apostle to the circumcised and the other to the uncircumcised. One to the Jews, one to the Gentiles. They remained different, but they became the face of apostleship, pillars of the church. It's almost as if when we think about entering into the kingdom of God, we have those two pillars right there. We even think of Peter holding the keys to the kingdom. That's what the window shows up there—he's holding a key.

As we think about those two incredible apostles sent to be messengers, they were filled with a desire to share the way their lives had been changed by this Christ who had moved among them. They couldn't help it. They just couldn't stay quiet. They had to run out and invite everybody they saw. They had good news to share and they wanted to share it. They felt called to share it and to encourage others to recognize the grace that they had received could be shared. God had come among us and offered forgiveness and grace, offered a way, was with us in the spirit, leading.

So we have these two to remind us of that wonderful thing that they have done and that apostles have done. The interesting thing about apostles is this. How many apostles did Jesus name? Twelve. We know one of them kind of dropped out. We know one of those original apostles was pretty famous and that one who wasn't even an original apostle got pretty famous. What about the others? Do we ever hear of them again? James and John get mentioned as pillars of the church in Jerusalem. We're not sure it's even the same James and John. Where are those other apostles?

I believe that those other apostles were at work just as much as these two. But they did it in a different way. They are the ones that went out and lived in a community and by their actions and by their grace and by their caring and by inviting others into conversation, their seed took root and a community grew. You never hear of them because they simply did the work of Christ. They weren't the ones that needed to travel so much, but they were there living out the faith and it was with them that the faith grew.

So not all apostles are famous. Not all the ways God works are noticed. I think that's so true. As we think about those in our own lives who were apostles to us, who are the ones who brought us the invitation, who helped us walk in a way that we discovered the good news? I bet some of those people we would never

have thought of as apostles until we think back on it. I can think of a grandma who, by encouraging her granddaughter to come each day and do devotions with her, brought the good news to that granddaughter. She was an apostle without even trying. I mean it wasn't necessarily her purpose. I think about who were apostles in our lives, who spoke into our lives that allowed us to hear that good news? It also makes me wonder how often are we apostles? How often are we speaking the good news into somebody's life, inviting them into that good news without even realizing it?

The other nice thing is that we don't all have to be apostles. We don't have to think that that's necessarily our calling. As it says in Ephesians, there are prophets, and pastors, and teachers, and apostles who are all equipped for ministry. As we recognize the wonder of the love, grace, and forgiveness that Christ brings, he shows us a way and allows the Spirit to be with us so that we can serve one another in love. It comes through in a multitude of ways. Sometimes people are sent in big, amazing ways and sometimes it's somebody simply taking a moment to pray with us, to encourage us, to love us. I thank God for the apostles in my life. How about you? Amen.

Gracious God, we are thankful that you have not only entered into this world with us, you have enabled us to be part of your work, equipping us for ministry, guiding us in ways that allow us to express the wonder of your grace, to live according to your way, to hear the whisperings of the spirit, the way your word speaks into our lives, and to live into the joy of knowing you that we might go out in peace, joining together as a community of faith to be your people. Thank you for the apostles that you have given us and the way that you turn us into apostles at times when we don't even realize it. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.