



ST. MARK'S ON THE CAMPUS

Episcopal Church

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The Rev. Jerrold Thompson
Sermon for St Mark's Day
St. Mark's on the Campus
April 29, 2007

As I was getting ready for this morning, I briefly considered suggesting that St. Mark's on the Campus should move in a new direction – and then holding up a plastic snake! Wouldn't that make the next Vestry meeting interesting?

I decided against that idea. And, you'll be happy to know, I have no intention or desire to introduce snake handling or drinking poison into our liturgical tradition.

Most scholars would agree that the passage we have as our reading this morning is a late addition to the gospel of Mark, and that it shouldn't be treated with the same weight as the remainder of Mark's gospel.

However, do we want to throw out the entire passage, or do we want to claim some of it as being *consistent* with the good news of Jesus Christ? Take, for example, the line, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation"? I especially like the part, "the whole creation": *nothing* is exempt from the good news. *Nothing* is exempt from the love of God. No one. No thing.

And how about the part about what the disciples did in response? "They went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere" - everywhere! - "while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it." That line reminds me of another passage, this one from the Acts of the Apostles.

There's considerable discussion going on in the Jewish council about what to do with these followers of Jesus who are proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah. Some of the council members are so angry they would like to kill the apostles. But the wise Pharisee Gamaliel says to them, "Let these men alone. Because if their undertaking is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them – in that case you might even be found fighting against God."

If this is of God, it will last; if not, then it won't.

"They went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked *with* them and *confirmed* the message by the signs that accompanied them." It's reassuring to know that, when we are following the leading of the Holy Spirit, God is working with us to confirm what we do. It's also reassuring to know that -- when we miss the mark and we're not following the leading of the Spirit -- God is working to take care of *that* as well.

Our trust in both those realities – that God is working to confirm the leading of the Spirit and that God is also working to correct us when we go in a different direction – our trust that both those are true enables us to step out in faith, to take risks when we believe that we're following the leading of the Holy Spirit, but aren't absolutely positive. Because if we are, God will confirm it, and if we're not, God will take care of it.

Ultimately, God's success doesn't depend on us! We can seek divine wisdom and guidance, bravely trust in God, and forge ahead with faith that if we blow it and go in the wrong direction, God will draw us back.

It would be nice if all the signs God used of confirmation were very obvious. But they usually *aren't* on white poster board with bright red lettering: "Go church!" *I* might make a sign like that for you; in fact I did!

SIGN: GO ST MARK'S ON THE CAMPUS!!!

For whatever reasons – and I'm sure God has reasons -- God usually doesn't handle things in that same way. Sometimes I think it would be nice if God *did* handle things like that! But then again, that's rather up to God, isn't it?

It's good to know that we're not alone in our ministry, isn't it? It's good to know that the Lord is working even harder than *we* are working to make our ministry thrive and bear fruit, to confirm the message of the good news of Jesus Christ as we take it into our world.

Earlier this week, an article appeared in the newspaper announcing the choice of a development project for the block on which we sit. Some of you know from the church email list that I spoke with the Economic Development Director of the city and he assured me that our property is NOT involved in the project. Which I was glad to hear. But this project WILL affect us. We can't possibly have a complex rise directly to our east without it affecting us – not if we're following the call to proclaim the good news to the whole creation.

It's not too early to begin praying about how God is calling us to be affected by this reality.

It's a big change.

How is the Lord calling us to respond to it in our ministry?

How can we proclaim the good news to this changing part of God's creation?

How can we become a source of ministry to this new community?

And how can we invite them to be a part of our ministry to the community we already serve?

It really is an exciting time to *be* St. Mark's on the Campus.

It's an exciting time for us to proclaiming the good news to the people around us, across the street, next door to us --- in fact, to the whole creation.

It's an exciting time to be a follower of Jesus in *this* place.

And we can always count on the reality that the new ministries into which Jesus is calling us today and next year and five years down the line will require us to change and risk and grow in order to respond to that call. That's at the very heart of the call of the cross, and not much growth in ministry will happen here without change and risk and our trust in the unseen.

There's an important warning in Mark's gospel. It occurs right before our passage for today. "Later Jesus appeared to the eleven as they were sitting at table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen."

I can't imagine Jesus upbraiding *this* community. But maybe that's naive, because after all, none of us are perfect. I also know that as Jesus calls us forward, it will be more tempting to trust in *ourselves* rather than in God. To fear taking risks. And many wise people have said that the opposite of faith is not doubt, but fear. So we don't want to act on fear. And no, I don't have any particular risk in mind. But as we serve in ministry together, it's inevitable that we will be asked to take one risk or another as we follow the call of God.

The Vestry will be meeting in retreat in a few weeks, and part of our time together will be looking a bit further out than we have been looking: where do we hear God calling St. Mark's on the Campus in the next three years? In the next five years? How about ten years? I am asking all of you to pray for that Vestry visioning process, especially in light of potentially changing realities right on our doorstep. Pray for *God-granted* vision to your Vestry.

I hope you're praying for your parish leadership *all* the time, that we may have *God granted* vision! But I'm asking you to pray especially in the next several weeks before we meet on May 13.

I'll close with one final thought.

HOLD UP SIGN: GO ST. MARK'S ON THE CAMPUS!!!

Go ... into the world – and proclaim the good news to the whole creation!