

Handout for Mission Conference - November 2018
The Rev. Canon Susan Brown Snook

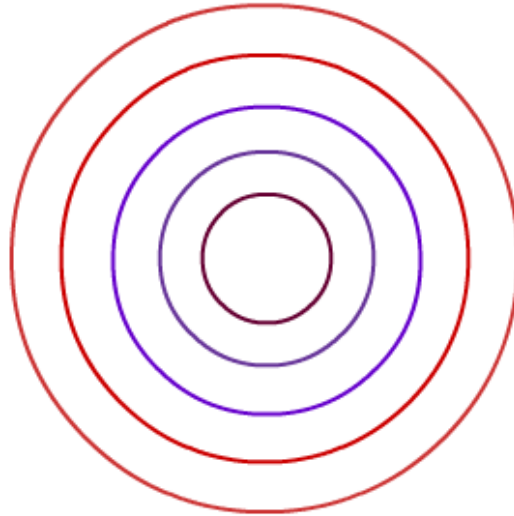
Address #1: Signs of the Times - Acts 1:1-8

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

1. What word or phrase in this passage catches your attention in this passage?
2. What does this passage have to do with our church or our world today?
3. What is God calling you to do or be or change?

Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the Ends of the Earth



- Jerusalem = Inner Circle - people already in the church
2nd Circle - friends, family, neighbors, coworkers of people in the church
(our immediate circle of influence)
- Judea = 3rd Circle - people in our area who are LIKE the people in our church
Samaria = 4th Circle - people in our area who are UNLIKE the people in our church
Ends of earth = 5th Circle - people far away who still might hear the good news of
Jesus from people in our church.

Brainstorm: who are the people in each of these circles for you and your church?

Who does your church spend the most time witnessing to? Talking about God with?

How could your church witness to people in the other circles? Which circles are most important? Which circles are likely to be the most fruitful?

Address #2: Great Joy in That City – Acts 8:1-8

And Saul approved of their killing him. That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria. Devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison. Now those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them.

Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them. The crowds with one accord listened eagerly to what was said by Philip, hearing and seeing the signs that he did, for unclean spirits, crying with loud shrieks, came out of many who were possessed; and many others who were paralyzed or lame were cured. So there was great joy in that city.

1. What catches your attention in this passage? What do you find most remarkable?
2. What are the biggest challenges to proclaiming the gospel in your context?
3. How would your congregation change the way it behaved if everyone acted like the church's biggest challenges were also its greatest opportunities?
4. Given the challenges in your context, what opportunities might lie hidden inside them?

What is a Witness?

A witness is someone who:

- Saw or experienced something
- Tells others about it

What have you seen or experienced about God? Write a sentence or two about your most vivid memory of God's presence with you.

Pair up and tell that story to another person, then listen as they tell their story to you.

An Exercise

Who do I know who may be receptive to a deeper relationship with God, a closer community of friends, or in need of a church home?

- Fondly remembers growing up on a church but not active in one now
- Life transition: family birth / illness / death
- Dissatisfied with their current life
- They have been on your mind lately
- Family member
- Friend
- Co-worker, Fellow Student, Fellow Club Member
- Other

A Prayer for that Person: Dear God, I know that you love _____ and you know what is in their heart and on their mind. If you would like me to extend an invitation or speak to them about you, please give me an opportunity and give me the appropriate words to say. I lift _____ up to you and ask for your love and blessing upon [him/her]. Amen.

Address # 3: The Idols of the World: Acts 8:9-25

Now a certain man named Simon had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he was someone great. All of them, from the least to the greatest, listened to him eagerly, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." And they listened eagerly to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. But when they believed Philip, who was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Even Simon himself believed. After being baptized, he stayed constantly with Philip and was amazed when he saw the signs and great miracles that took place.

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit (for as yet the Spirit had not come^{ed} upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God's gift with money! You have no part or share in this, for your heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and the chains of wickedness." Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may happen to me."

Now after Peter and John had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, proclaiming the good news to many villages of the Samaritans.

1. What personal spiritual disciplines are important to you in resisting evil and growing in your faith and determination to follow Jesus?
2. When in your life or in the lives of those around you have you observed people living in obedience to one of the idols of the world?
3. What is the role of the church in helping people turn away from false idols and following the living God instead?

Exercise:

What is your favorite Bible story or passage? What does it mean to you? Why does it express the truth of Christ for you?

Create your elevator speech for the gospel. How would you describe to someone in one minute or less why you are a Christian?

Address #4: To the Ends of the Earth – Acts 8:26-40

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south^[g] to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.” So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” He replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

“Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
so he does not open his mouth.
In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken away from the earth.”

The eunuch asked Philip, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

1. What catches your attention in this passage? What do you find remarkable?
2. If the Holy Spirit told your church to “Get up and go” to some place or people in your community, where or to whom might the Spirit direct you?
3. Think about the Baptismal Covenant. Which of these promises are most meaningful to you?
 - To continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers
 - To persevere in resisting evil and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord
 - To seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbour as yourself
 - To strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being
 - To safeguard the integrity of God’s creation and respect, sustain, and renew the life of the Earth

Exercise:

- What are the most important social issues facing the community in which your church is located?

- Whom would you talk to in your community to find out more about these issues and how your church could take an important role?

- What ideas do you have for ways you or your church could effectively serve the surrounding community?

How Might You and Your Church Be a Witness to People in Each of Your Circles of Influence?

First circle:

Second circle:

Third circle:

Fourth circle:

Fifth circle:

Additional Resources

Invite Welcome Connect: a method of inviting people to your church; welcoming them once they arrive; and helping them get connected in the community of faith.

- Created by Mary Parmer of the Beecken Center, University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee.
- See resources at <http://www.invitewelcomeconnect.com/>

Faith Sharing Dinners: A program in the Episcopal Diocese of Texas. People from a church get together for small group dinners in people's homes, in groups of 8 to 12 people. The dinner is an ordinary social occasion. Over dessert, each person takes turns answering one Faith Sharing Question.

- Full resources at <http://www.sharingfaithdinners.com/home#resources>

Becoming the Beloved Community: The Episcopal Church (USA) has named racial healing and reconciliation as one of the most important priorities for our church.

- Resources for congregations and groups to explore racial reconciliation in light of the gospel are at <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/beloved-community>

Episcopal Evangelism: The Episcopal Church has named evangelism as one of its top priorities: proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ in our words and actions.

- TEC's definition of evangelism: *Through the spiritual practice of evangelism, we seek, name and celebrate Jesus' loving presence in the stories of all people - then invite everyone to MORE.*
- Many resources to empower Episcopal evangelism can be found here: <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/evangelism-initiatives>

Exploring Evangelism Through Social Media: The new world is a digital world, and brings both unprecedented challenges and opportunities. How can we use social media to help us be Jesus' witnesses?

- Social media evangelism resources can be found here: <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/evangelism-toolkit/social-media>

Renewal Works: A Ministry of Forward Movement: Research into the spiritual vitality of US Episcopal congregations, and a program to assess a church's spiritual vitality and help it grow.

- <http://renewalworks.org/>
- <https://www.forwardmovement.org/>
- Forward Movement Daily Prayers and Meditations: <http://prayer.forwardmovement.org/>