

Section E – People and Personal Viewpoints

This section is testimonies and stories of how individuals have come to faith through kingdom-based evangelism and more polemical pieces that the whole Writing Group don't all necessarily agree with, or have experience of.

E1. Four Stories

Kevin Ellis

1. THE RELUCTANT EVANGELIST

I have been an evangelist for as long as I can remember. I am, however, sometimes a reluctant one. I love speaking about Jesus. It is a long time since I did any street preaching, but I enjoyed that, whether that be outside the Tower of London or near the Big Market in Newcastle or, indeed, outside of Rotherham Minster.



I have never understood why people think evangelistic activity is offensive; after all, people try to persuade us to do things that we do not necessarily want to do whether that is to buy something we do not really need or vote for a particular party. All sorts of opinions are - and should be - welcome in the public square. I suppose there are questions about this when public proclamation turns up uninvited on your doorstep. Yet I spent over two and a half years as a shy and hesitant teenager doing just that in London and was rarely rebuffed aggressively for doing so. Cold calling might have decreased significantly, but I have lost count of the number of times callers have tried

to remind me of accidents that I have not had. Indeed, as a priest, whether in Birmingham or Amlwch, I have never not been given a warm welcome when I have just turned up to offer to pray for people or share a little of the story of Jesus with them.

Given that it is something that I enjoy, why would I be reluctant about it? Maybe I am naturally hesitant about telling people what they should do. Yet the point of evangelism is to get to a decision isn't it? I recall being on a mission weekend with the then Archbishops' Missioner, Michael Green. I was asked to share my Christian story at a particular event. I did so. Afterwards, Michael simply asked why I had not asked those listening to become Christians.

Similarly, when I was a curate in Gloucester, I was part of the suffragan bishop's faith sharing team. With a couple of others, we developed some Murder Mystery events that were focused on proclaiming the faith. The Bishop asked me why I had not been more specific about those present becoming Christians. I began hesitantly to explain that my goal was to introduce people to a story, and the story would attract people. I think I still believe that to be true.

I remember talking to Ann Morisy, community theologian and engagement specialist, about evangelism many years ago. She loves football, as do I. I remember her comparing the evangelist to the centre forward, whose job is simple: to score goals. I have never

seen it as being as clear cut as that. I create space and opportunities for the stories of God to blossom and grow. Maybe evangelism is a bit like the Kingdom, it grows, initially hidden like the mustard seed, hidden like the yeast, or haphazard as the seed that has been thrown by the sower.

2. WANDERING INTO FAITH

Before going to train for ordination, I worked at the Cheltenham and Gloucester College of HE. I was a biblical scholar by training and went to the local parish church. I got to know J through his wife who attended the same church. Our wives were firm friends. All J knew about me was that I was a professional Christian, and he was quite clear he did not want to know anything about religion. We became good friends. Over a period of 18 months, J would begin to turn the conversation to matters of faith. Sometimes I replied. Often, I would switch the conversation to the garden, football, or politics. We would talk about elements of my work, even about the apologetics course that I was leading with a group of ordinands, but not about personal faith as it related it to him. It created frustration on the one hand, in that J wanted to talk so that he could refute what I was saying. The not saying anything approach is not an Alpha-like strategy, but for J it allowed him space and time to wander into a life of faith. Eventually this led him to attending his local church regularly with his wife.

3. INCLUDED WITHOUT QUESTION

R was part of the film club that I was running in a local school. His family did not go a particular church but were connected to the local chapel for occasional offices/life events. The film club was not explicitly Christian. We were as likely to watch Toy Story, Shrek, or Star Wars as the Miracle Maker. R needed to be persuaded by his teacher to come to the club. He did not like school particularly. But given that all we did was watch films, share lunch, and allow each other to say how we were doing, he came and enjoyed it.

The film club was deliberately called 'Q' for Question. It deliberately allowed children space and time to be themselves. R is now in his mid-20s. He and I are still in touch. He is the first person in three generations to have a job. And yes, he is a member of a church now. How did it happen? It was not all to do with the club, and it was not a specific conversation. Like J, it was about creating space for R to relate to faith. It is messy because faith is not offered to people as something pre-packaged within Kingdom Evangelism, rather it is a gift given and people open it at their own pace. R knew from Q Club he was valued, and heard me tell stories of Jesus, who included without question. It was a beginning, and R's story is still ongoing.

4. MEETING GOD ON THE BEACH

T is a mum of 3 and married to S. They met me because they wanted to get married in church. This is a common story for ordained ministers. You do not need to take an overtly Kingdom Evangelism approach to offer welcome. Where it is different from what I might call a flat pack evangelism strategy, with easy steps and straightforward progress, is that

Kingdom evangelists acknowledge that people come in different ways. I imagine, in the life of Jesus, that Matthew the tax collector came differently to Simon and Andrew, the fishermen. T had had some sort of church background. This was obvious in arranging her wedding service. Her children come to Messy Church, and occasionally attended the Parish Eucharist. They were often the only children there. This young family were not there every week.



T and S confess that sometimes getting three primary aged children ready for an hour-long service seems too much. Their honesty is refreshing, and their lives, like mine, are sometimes messy. They sometimes read in church or lead prayers, challenge what I say on social media, or talk about meeting what feels like God on the beach rather than in a church building.

They use some of the materials prepared by the Diocese for families, teaching their children to pray and engage with the Bible stories, and sometimes they will not use them, because a faith that is not them is required.

How you can take part in this work

1.

1. Contributions

We welcome additions to this resource, which will be available as a website which can include sound files.

Please email your piece to office@utusheffield.org.uk by 1 November for consideration by the Writing Group.

2. Seminar/support group

The Writing Group recognises that some ministers who come from this perspective can feel very isolated and/or frustrated that their understanding of what is Good News and how to share it is not valued by colleagues.

We are looking to hold an online get-together to share ideas, encouragement and prayer, some of which might become items for the website if people want that, quarterly on Monday afternoons for 1 1/4 hour. Please check dates and book via office@utusheffield.org.uk and help shape how this develops.

E2. Testimony - A caretaker's question

S.G.

S.G. is in her 60s and lives and worships in an inner city area. The church would probably describe itself as 'open evangelical' in Anglican terms, with years of Kingdom work in its local community, some from a radical viewpoint (in S's early years). This is her story:

I was Christened at St John's, X is where I was born but I grew up in Y where I now live. My family were never churchgoers. We had a wide extended family and our gatherings were in pubs, clubs, parties in our homes and big family trips to Lincolnshire.

However, the church was part of my life with Whitsuntide and Easter parades, gatherings in the park, jumble sales at church and the Salvation Army playing every Sunday morning right outside our house. I remember at school the Bible stories and Jesus and singing in assembly. The church didn't figure in my life at all once I had grown up and gone off to college and work, getting married and having a family.

I had gone to the local primary school and my children attended the same school, Church was the place for Christingle, and Holiday Club. The vicarage was next door to school and both me and my children had a feeling that we were somehow included in the flock.

The vicar took my father's funeral, and during the service I experienced the presence of God. I brushed it aside, accepting it as a great comfort in my grief. It took me over 5 years to walk into the church to my first Sunday Service after my father died.

It was a Tai Chi class that led me into church. I attended a class there for exercise and walked through the building once a week, seeing into the worship area through the big glass doors. I had started to want to go inside the worship area but I again kept brushing it off.



E, who was the caretaker, was a friend of mine, and he often said "You come in here a lot, why don't you come to church?", and one day I said "OK, I'll be there on Sunday"!

I came in as an outsider but the readings, the welcome, prayers, the communion, the sermon and the coffee struck a chord in me. I was amazed by a parable which was read, and as I began to read the Bible and attend more services, I was amazed. I was amazed that the disciples were amazed too!!

So, the wonderful congregation at church embraced me! I wanted to help out serving coffee and welcoming on Sundays, as I had been welcomed. I helped at Lunch Club on my day off from work and when I retired I became Church Warden and more involved in

Bible study and coffee mornings, weekly prayers, connecting with the community and church council.

It was a defining moment when I knew I wanted to be a follower of Jesus and it was on that first Sunday in the service. It has rolled on and out from then.

It is a challenge. I've had many mentors and role models at church and beyond. I have watched and listened and been pointed by my generous teachers, always, to the Bible as my guide.

We want to see this grow.
Contact office@utusheffield.org.uk to contribute or to
take part in the supportive quarterly seminar series.

E3. Evangelism: Putting the ‘E’-Word in its Place

Glen Marshall, for Urban Expression Gathering, Nov 2011

“I no longer believe in evangelism. To be post evangelism is to live our lives in Christ without a strategy but with compassion and the servant posture of Jesus Christ. We do not do evangelism or have a mission. The Holy Spirit is the evangelist, and the mission belongs to God. What we do is simply live our lives publicly and as a community in the way of Jesus Christ, and when people inquire as to why we live this way, we share with them an account of the hope within us. We are to love one another, and that creates its own attraction. Taking care of people who are sick and needy creates all the evangelism we need.”

Karen Ward, Church of the Apostles, Seattle.

WHAT HAVE WE [BAPTISTS] DONE TO EVANGELISM?

Among other things:

1. We have allowed revivalism to become normative: Wesleys, Whitefield, Edward’s [...] Moody, Graham, Pilau
2. We have instrumentalised it and thereby corrupted it: an obsession with results and numbers
3. We have turned it in a thing (reified it) and thereby mystified it: a thing apart primarily for special people at special times

WHAT’S TO BE DONE IF WE ARE TO PUT EVANGELISM IN ITS PLACE?

We should:

1. Commit to dialogue and mission in bold humility. neither arrogance or diffidence
2. Rehabilitate persuasion: Neither ‘so that’ nor ‘regardless’ but ‘in hope’
3. Integrate Being, Doing and Telling: Being too passive, doing too ambiguous, telling too empty
4. Prioritise faithfulness
5. Contextualise and personalise: ~~To whom it may concern~~ To Alex, 34 Yourstreet, JC20 0AO.



E4. Living The Story

Becky Farrell

In 2011/12 I had some experiences which I could not explain in any way other than that they were experiences of God. I realised that I needed a religious framework for my renewed relationship with God, and I fairly dispassionately considered my options. I didn't ask myself which religion is true. I knew that I could make a convincing argument for or against most things. Instead, I asked myself, which story am I prepared to live within? Which story will I allow to change me?

Christianity was in my background so it would seem the obvious choice. I was aware that the tradition holds much treasure along with all that had made me walk away from it in the past. I did, however, consider other religions. The thing that made me settle on becoming a part of the Christian story was one simple but mysterious thing: incarnation.

As Christians we intuitively use themes from the story of Christianity as stories of ourselves and our situations, such as Good Friday and Easter framing our understanding of getting through a difficult situation with the hope of better times following. Another theme we might apply to ourselves is that of exile and restoration, or perhaps a long wander in the desert before reaching the Promised Land. These could be said to be metaphors but it's more than that. This is the story that we inhabit and that inhabits us.



Jesus taught by telling parables, which often become more mini stories inside which we can live. He is also a living parable as the Way for us to live. We believe in Jesus as historical figure, Jesus as second Person of the Trinity, but also we believe/trust in him as story. The story of Jesus is our story. It's the story of how we are to live. The great themes: incarnation/kenosis, the extraordinary in the ordinary, the flow of God-humanity-humanity-God, resurrection into a new kind of life, concerns for those on the edge, the beatitudes and so

on ... these become our story too. These are the stories, the themes, the movements/ rhythms by which we live. We read, are puzzled by, learn from, Jesus' parables, but we also learn from the story of who he is, how he lived, what he cared about, his sheer ordinariness as well as all the rest. Part of following Jesus is to live his story. Part of following Jesus is that he, in some way, lives ours.

This is what it is about incarnation that hooked me into the Christian story. Having lived through many intense periods of suffering, there was something compelling about a God who, through living a human life, had suffered firsthand. This was not a God who was compassionate but ultimately distant. The Christian story into which I have thrown my lot is one of a God whose nature is, fundamentally, relationship, coming to dwell among us as a vulnerable human, experiencing firsthand all the joys and sorrows that human life entails, and taking this human experience into the heart of God. Incarnation is the story of self-emptying, defenceless love. We see this in the Christ of eternity becoming the Jesus of history. We are invited to make space for God in ourselves and take part in the incarnation of this unfolding story.

E4

Too often, Christians talk as if Jesus only needed to come to earth to die, and neglect to consider his life, teaching and incarnation. Such a view impoverishes us and leads to exclusivism, dualism and a lack of generosity of spirit. How is that good news? With more emphasis on incarnation and joyful participation, the gospel actually sounds like good news. It's an invitation to love and be loved, and a mission to live within and be transformed by the unfolding story of love that is the heartbeat of the universe. Living within this story is not only transforming personally. It draws us to reach beyond ourselves to join with God in the incarnation of the Kingdom.

E5. Where does Evangelism Fit into Discipleship?

Erica Dunmow

Jesus stated his mission in three main places (there are others):

Mark 1:14 "... and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'"

Luke 4:18-19 "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 favour."

John 10:10 "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

He instructs the disciples in their mission:

initially in Matthew 10:6-8a (cf Luke 10:9) "... but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near'. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." in John 20:21-23, "Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you". When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven ..." in Matthew 28:19-20a: "Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." In Luke 24:46-48: "...and he said to them, "Thus it is written that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.""

The working out of what these passages mean in practice has been the task of Christians ever since, and partly centres upon two key things: what is the 'gospel' or 'good news', and what is the Kingdom? And in our current 21st century Western context we are challenged by the expectation of healing.

The concept of the Kingdom is that prefigured by the Old Testament prophets as a place of justice and joy, where God reigns and all live by God's commandments and values.

The term gospel itself simply means 'news to gladden the heart' – it doesn't actually have any other content. But over the years its use has been truncated to mean a specific belief statement. That is not Biblical, and needs to be challenged.



‘BIG E’ EVANGELISM

Evangelism has become narrowed in its most popular usage to mean a body of theology centred upon the cross as the key event of Jesus’ ministry, which can be summed up as ‘the three hours that saved me’.

Evangelical theology with a big E requires that, to be identified as a Christian, a person needs to believe that the crucifixion is *the* point at which Jesus paid the price for our sin (Penal Substitution Theory of the Atonement - PSAT), as the Evangelical Alliance has it: “The atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross: dying in our place, paying the price of sin and defeating evil, so reconciling us with God.” That point is seen as *the* good news - belief in Christ is equated with belief in the efficacy of the cross to cancel out a person’s sinfulness and save their eternal soul. Leading a person to making a personal faith statement is seen as *the* point of evangelism.

THEOLOGIES OF THE CROSS

The penal substitution understanding of the cross event is taken mainly from Acts and the Epistles rather than the Gospels and Jesus’ own teaching. Jesus does not use salvation language often. His nearest statements are in John 10:27–28, “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life; and they will never perish.”, and in Mark 8:35 (paralleled in Matthew 16:25, Luke 9:24 and John 12:25) Jesus says: “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.”

The theological understanding of the cross event within the Bible is actually quite varied – and the Christian community as a whole has never come to a firm conclusion as to whether there is just one way to interpret it. The Apostles’ Creed – the oldest agreed document of the faith of the Church of the mid 200s - merely states belief in the events: “[Jesus] suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again”. The Nicene Creed of 325 CE is similarly an account of events with the additional preface that Jesus: “for us and for our salvation came down from heaven...”.

OTHER POSSIBLE BASES FOR GOOD NEWS BASED ON JESUS

The Christian community needs to reclaim the fact that the ‘good news’ that Jesus brought and that we are required to spread is wider and richer than just personal piety based upon three hours of Jesus’ life.

Alternative paradigms for good news from our theological understandings of Jesus can centre on:

- the forgiveness and reconciliation demonstrated by and after the Resurrection (three days)
- the mission of Jesus as described in his life (three years)
- the validating of humanity in the virgin birth and incarnation as signs of God’s entrusting to humanity of our own destiny (thirty-three years)
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- the eternal Word that speaks the wonder of the world into life (3.3 gigayears and counting!)

We will each have our favourite that speaks to us and that we can therefore speak about, with authenticity.

KIN'DOM OR REALM EVANGELISM

A model that we are particularly interested in exploring is that which Jesus initially proclaimed – evangelism based upon the Kingdom or realm of God. It needs to take into account the more inclusive Gospel statements contained in Matthew 25:31-46 where Jesus promises that those who *do* rather than *say* will enter heaven, and John 10:16 where there are sheep not of this fold who will also hear his voice.

The Luke 4 passage given at the start (quoting Isaiah 61:1-2) is helpfully more explicit about what the good news *is* – it's about restoration for people who are oppressed and something that will gladden the hearts of poor people.



The Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed is a place where not only people will know that God loves them and that the relationship is an eternal one of life in its fullness, but a Kingdom where there is a sense of parity and justice before God and between people. Belief is tied to actions that follow Jesus' example.

What we do about the instruction to heal needs careful thought, but the task of bringing about reconciliation, of enabling people to feel forgiven and to be able to cast aside shame is a huge task that we can definitely offer from within the churches. The Samaritan Woman at the well – arguably the first evangelist outwith the twelve called Disciples – believes that Jesus is the Messiah because he knows who she is and still treats her with respect and asks her to serve him. “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!”

HOW DO WE 'PROCLAIM' THAT?

How do we attract people to engage in discipleship and a faith journey of following Jesus that is beyond personal piety, and to be part of a Christian community holistically addressing the life of the world and working to bring justice and joy to all?

There have been various moves in the last 20 years to enrich Christians of all theologies in their faith, and encourage them to engage with and explore how they can witness out of their own experience and understanding of God in their own lives. All Christians who have a reasonably active faith can tune in to God's promptings and 'gossip the Gospel' and drop God into the conversation at some point, if they prayerfully expect the opportunities to arise, and don't expect to have to do anything more than honestly answer any questions that follow. That is all that it takes – the Holy Spirit goes before us and does the rest. Our answers will be just part of what that person will be hearing about Jesus, and if they are ready to hear, they will hear.

Even our wrestlings with God, or with trying to see kingdom values lived out, can speak because they are making the concept of the kingdom known, because they are making God real and relatable. It is not for us to convert or convince or persuade or pressurise other people. The attempts that Christians have made to ‘bring their children to faith’ or change the hearts of dying relatives are not models that need to be followed. We trust in God’s providing and not in any efforts of our own.

As we “love justice, do kindness and walk humbly with our God” (Micah 6:8): as we “love God and love our neighbours as ourselves” (Matthew 22:37-39) and “love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34) and are known to be followers of Jesus, that will attract people to become intrigued by the Jesus who inspires us. Then, just as we would share good news about our sports team’s victory, or becoming a parent, or progressing a task we’ve been putting off, so if we simply share on Twitter that a campaign in our workplace for greater pay parity is progressing, or with people outside our household that we are adopting a simpler lifestyle, or with friends at a distance that we have found reconciliation and forgiveness; and indicate that’s a cause for thankfulness and rejoicing as part of God’s Kingdom, we can let God do the rest.

(all Bible texts NRSVA)

We want to see this grow.
Contact office@utusheffield.org.uk to contribute or to
take part in the supportive quarterly seminar series.