

St. PAUL'S CHURCH  
PENTECOST 7 - PROPER 9-B (RCL)

Wellsboro, PA  
7 July 2024

2 Samuel 5: 1-5, 9-10  
Psalm 48  
2 Corinthians 12: 2-10  
Mark 6:1-13

*TWO by TWO*  
+ + +

Just think of those poor young folk who travel the country,  
knocking at house to house, to have the door slammed in their face.  
Years ago, it was telemarketers who got the phone slammed down  
at dinner time, or any time.  
Now-a-days, though, it's Spam in my InBox - delete, delete, delete.  
This Chinese yard mesh manufacturer which thinks my company, well...  
They don't know if I even *have* a company - *do* I have a company?

The weekly - or weak - joke:  
A young woman had a Unitarian mother and a Jehovah's Witness father.  
A Unitarian married to a Jehovah's Witness and they have a daughter.  
She kept walking up the street knocking on doors,  
but she didn't know why.  
Ask me at Coffee Hour.  
So...

Michael J. Fox, famous actor and Parkinson's Disease victim,  
published a book some years ago, which I highly recommend:  
*Always Looking Up: The Adventures of an Incurable Optimist*  
He describes an experience he had while on vacation:

Late one morning, Tracy was out on a bike ride and I was lounging on the wrap-around porch reading. Hearing the crunch of footsteps on the gravel driveway, I looked up to see a youngish couple, she in a plain modest dress and he in a suit jacket and tie, making their way toward the house. I met them at the edge of the porch, knowing, of course, that they were Jehovah's Witnesses. They introduced themselves as such and handed me a *Watchtower* tract.

According to family practice and the custom of most people I've known throughout my life, my next move was supposed to be to say, "No thanks," and close the door politely but firmly. Two things prevented me from doing that. The first, most practical reason being that we were outside, and therefore I had no door to close in their face even if I was so inclined. Secondly, I was curious. What message is so powerful that it compels these people to don church clothes on a hot August day and set out on foot to visit homes to which they are uninvited, petitioning people who don't want to see

them, to deliver a message they don't want to hear?

Are they driven by hope, by faith, by fear for me or for themselves? I was as surprised as they were to hear myself invite them onto the porch to have a seat. They had roughly fifteen minutes or so to tell me their story...  
...You could say that my willingness to hear them out was an expression of *my* faith, my instinct that it's always good to give something when I can. I like to think that I'm open to other people, unafraid of new ideas. It was unlikely that during those few minutes on the porch I could be coerced into surrendering my soul, so there was no reason why I couldn't surrender a few minutes of my time. This was an opportunity to hear their point of view, not to defend my own.

*pp. 159-160*

Fox asks a very poignant question: "What message is so powerful?"  
What would it be like if Episcopalians witnessed to the message of our faith?  
What we preach, what we teach, how we vote, and what we believe.

Sue said one time when two blonds in dark suits and white button down shirts and ties, came to the door:

"We're OK. My husband's a priest."

(You're married to a priest? Priests aren't supposed to be married.)

I imagine they walked away shaking the dust off their sandals,  
or polished black patten-leathers.

What message is so powerful

that you would want to have doors slammed in your face  
day after day, year after year,

for 2 years of "missionary" work, or the rest of your life?

Would you be willing to spread the drastic, universe-life-changing  
eternity-changing message of Jesus Christ

and your own story of salvation from sin and promise of heaven?

I wonder if those who walk from door to door even tell their own experience  
of God's - of Christ's - redeeming love in their own heart.

Is your message as powerful as that?

Could you, do you, express how God has moved in your life?

What separates us as Anglicans in the faith community,

is that we don't tell other people *what* to believe -

mainly because we're still trying to work it out for ourselves!

Instead, we strive to help people *how* to believe.

and to enter the journey with us

as we strive ourselves to deepen our faith.

Unlike our earlier Unitarian-Witness friend,

we don't knock on doors not knowing why.

We do know why – or we wouldn't be here.

When others knock on our doors,  
we don't tell them that they must follow our path -  
for they have their own calling  
and their own pathway to God which we pray they follow  
in the call to personal salvation.  
We don't teach or preach, we invite.  
we invite them *how* to believe as we have believed and as we do believe.  
Again, "I don't have any answers,  
but I'll walk beside you with the questions."  
And that is, to me, a much more powerful preaching.  
That is Christian community - Christian love and sharing  
Christian listening to the pains and needs  
and the struggles and questions another has.  
And I try so hard - even though it is sometimes very hard -  
not to shake the dust off my penny loafers.  
A message so real and so engaging that I hope you will invite someone  
onto your porch, and to join Fox:  
...You could say that my willingness to hear them out was an expression of *my*  
faith, my instinct that it's always good to give something when I can. I like to  
think that I'm open to other people, unafraid of new ideas.

If, and this is an improbable "If"  
*if* you were going to go from door to door, town to town,  
what is it that you would say, what would you share,  
what message would you give to the people -  
to that one person -  
that would keep them from slamming the door in your face?  
At the end of the service we will hear these words spoken or sung:

Go forth for God; go into the world in peace;  
be of good courage, armed with heavenly grace,  
in God's good Spirit daily to increase,  
tell in his kingdom we behold his grace.

Go forth for God; go to the world in joy;  
to serve the people every day and hour,  
and serving Christ, our every gift employ,  
rejoicing in the Holy Spirit's power.

*Hymnal 1982, #347, st. 1 & 4*

Go forth, and share with the world, one soul by one soul,  
the Good News of God in Christ's love for God's creation,  
for you as one of God's creations,  
and the one you encounter as someone to be loved and honored  
as likewise an equal member of God's creation.

And may you be blessed as you bless others.

AMEN.