

The seminary I attended had two apartment buildings for its students. It generally housed married students, and those with children. The single students were housed in rooms tucked away in various places around the campus. But the apartments were prominent, hard to miss.

One day a classmate of mine told me a story of an evangelist that came to her door. She greeted the person warmly when he asked, “Do you have a few minutes? I would like to discuss the Gospel with you.”

She replied enthusiastically by saying, “Of course! I have moved here from Wisconsin specifically to study the Gospel. I would love to have a discussion about the Gospel.”

The gentleman was a bit taken aback. He said, “You are here to study the Gospel? That’s odd.”

She assured him, “Oh no, everyone who lives in these buildings are here to study the Gospel. We all left our lives behind to come here to dedicate ourselves to the study of the Gospel. Come on in, I look forward to our discussion.”

She said, the man just stood there, dumbfounded, and turned and walked away quickly. It seemed even an evangelist didn’t want to be evangelized.

This morning, in my series of the sermons on the Baptismal Covenant’s five questions of holy obligation, we have come to the most troublesome of the lot: Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

This question seems to terrify people. My doctoral thesis is on these five questions. During my research, at a former parish, I taught a series of classes on each of the questions. Before the series I handed out a questionnaire asking how confident each

person was about each question, particularly in light of the Episcopal Church's practice, the Diocese's practice, the parish's practice, and their individual practices.

At the end of the class I handed out the same questionnaire to determine if my classes had any impact on the participants' awareness, and practices. This one question was the only question where there was no increase in confidence. In fact, there was a marked drop in confidence!

We Episcopalians are terrified of proclaiming the Gospel. But we do it all the time. You are doing it now.

This morning you rose from your rest, composed yourself, made your way here, to enter these doors in a timely fashion, to gather with other people to worship, learn, pray, and celebrate your faith.

That alone is an act of proclamation. Others see your life. Others know your priorities. Others know of your character, purposes, and convictions. You are proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ simply by being faithful to what you believe.

I suspect many, if not all of you who are parents, spent quite a few evenings putting your children to bed, reading them stories, and then praying with them. That was proclaiming.

I know that many of you seek to be helpful, tending to the needs of those who are suffering, whether it be from ill health, or random circumstances of our lives in a broken world. That is proclaiming.

I know that many of us have been hurt, and even betrayed by others. Yet we have forgiven those who have failed us because that is what our Lord taught us to do. That is proclaiming.

I also know that some of us have been the betrayer. We have failed others, ourselves, and our God. Yet we have made amends. We have sought, received, and treasured the forgiveness offered to us because that is what our Lord taught us to do. That, too, is proclaiming.

The heart of the Baptismal Covenant is all about action. Everyone one of these five questions starts with the words, "Will you," and is followed by at least one verb, at least one active verb. Will you continue, persevere, repent, return, seek and serve, loving, strive, respect...every single one of those verbs is a form of proclaiming.

Our question this morning does not ask us to knock on doors, stand on street corners, plaster our cars with stickers, or to hand out tracts to strangers. Instead it calls us to be true to who we are called to be, to be faithful to the hope we carry. As the apostle Peter wrote, "Always be ready to make your defense ... for the hope that is in you...."

Carry yourself as a Christian, be true to your calling. Answer any questions anyone might ask of why you live such a life, and you have proclaimed the Good News of God in Christ. If you are faithful to the other four questions in the Baptismal Covenant, you will be faithful in this one.

Or, as the old chestnut teaches us, "Preach the Gospel, use words when necessary."