

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, July 21, 2019.**

As you have probably guessed by now, I like sports. And, as I hope you have concluded by now, I like our Faith. Sometimes these favorites go hand in hand. I had that feeling as I read our second lesson today from Paul's letter to the Colossians (**Colossians 1:15-28**).

Imagine that you are a scout for a professional baseball team. Your job is to find talent and then recommend that talent to the person in the organization who is going to select talent on draft day.

You are really excited because you think you have found just the talent the team needs. You are lavish in your praise of this promising player. He can run like the wind. He has an arm that won't quit. His hands are so soft I have never seen him commit an error. And how he can hit. I have never seen him strike out. Plus he has a great attitude. He is a "can't miss" prospect.

Now, put yourself in the position of St. Paul trying to reassure skeptics in the early Christian community of Colossae that faith in Jesus is well founded. For starters, Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. All things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things.

Like the baseball scout, Paul is lavish in his praise. After all, Paul knows the power of Christ first hand. His own losing season was turned upside down by the Risen Christ. It's no wonder that Paul is excited about Jesus. Another "can't miss prospect."

But Paul's recommendations weren't always heeded. Not everyone was as enthused about Jesus as Paul was. And this made Paul sad. Like-wise, sometimes the recommendations of a baseball scout are not heeded, which saddens the scout.

Now, with which of these roles do you identify? Like Paul, do you share your faith with enthusiasm, and are saddened if your enthusiasm is not contagious? Or, like the owner, do you perhaps greet the believer's enthusiasm with skepticism, only to regret your caution later.

Chances are we are a mixed bag when it comes to sharing the Good News and receiving the Good News. We are probably not as excited as the scout, and not as skeptical as the owner. We end up developing our own style in terms professing our faith.

And what is helpful to you and me, as we seek our own receiving and sharing style, is to see what others have done. We see some examples in our other lessons today.

Abraham and Sarah (**Genesis 18:1-10a**) demonstrate God's love through hospitality. As a result, Sarah will have a son, something for which she and Abraham had been hoping for. A good deed, not punished, but rewarded.

Mary and Martha demonstrate their hospitality in different ways (**Luke 10:38-42**). This happens with brothers and sisters. Jesus gave thanks for both. His mistake perhaps was to label Mary's approach "the better part." No wonder that Martha was upset. But there's no indication that Jesus didn't appreciate what Martha contributed. She exercised her talents, just as Mary did.

There are versions of these differences in every community. Think of your contributions at work or at play or at church or as a member of this Island community. You do some things really well, and others do other things really well. Yes, there might be times when you feel you are doing more than your share and others are doing less. In the end, though, things usually get done, with everybody pulling some of the weight. Perhaps not in proportions that we think are fair, but fairness is often tough to judge.

When it comes to sharing our Faith, there is no right or wrong way. Every contribution, every effort, every style adds to the mix. Witnessing comes in unlikely ways. Let's say it has been years since you attended a church service. Then one day you decided "I'm going to church today. I don't care what others might think. I'm going to do it." And you do it. And people take note, and ask "What's with him or with her?" They're curious. And that's a good thing.

Maybe you are appearing to them as Mary appeared to Jesus. Mary sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying." Listening as a form of witness. Interesting concept, but there are others. Attending as a form of witness. Leading as a form of witness. Praying as a form of witness. Organizing as a form of witness. Donating as a form of witness. Asking tough questions as a form of witness.

Suffering in Faith as a form of witness. Forgiving as a form of witness. It makes an impression on observers. It all counts. We all count.

Well, what do you get when you gather all of these witnessing acts in one place? You get a congregation. We have a congregation. We have Marthas and we have Marys and we have Abrahams and we have Sarahs and we have one another. And this Island Community has all of us. What you do on Sunday mornings just by being here is a powerful witness. People drive by and they notice. They are curious. And some will want to learn more about what you, we, do.

Now, attendance, just showing up, may not be the most powerful witness that we are capable of. But who knows. People respond to witnessing in different ways. People connect in different ways. I am certain that there was, there is, or there will be, a curiosity factor in all of our lives. God acts through curiosity, and people respond through curiosity. You and I were curious. And we responded. And what we found was not just interesting, but compelling.

And here is a possibility that is really compelling. Namely, that at the heart of this transition from being curious/ to being compelled/ to learning more/ to being eager to share/ is the Creator of the Universe, acting through the Holy Spirit. For some, that possibility is an intellectual hurdle. For others, for you and me, it is a call, an invitation, a promise, a privilege, a joy.

The possibility of God engaging us, one by one, has brought us together. And it's that possibility that feels more and more like Truth with a capital T. The more we learn, the more we question, the more we engage in response to God's engagement, the deeper our faith, individual and collective, becomes.

Well, we have come a long way this morning, from baseball scouting to God worshipping. A stretch – pardon the pun? Maybe, or maybe not. Time will tell. In the meantime, it's all kind of fun, for which we can be grateful.

Gratitude. Now, there's another, powerful witness. So many ways to go deeper, to get closer, and to say "Thank you, Lord." Or, as the umpire might say, "Play ball!"

Amen.

