

## “Allergy To Evangelism”

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John 1:35-42 + really real evangelism

When I was working as chaplain at a Southern Baptist hospital in Amarillo, it was a requirement to attend the weekly Baptist Pastors' Conference lunches. At one of these luncheons, the scheduled speaker was called away at the last minute and a substitute was drafted fresh back from a mission to Korea.



The pastor quite off the top of his head told several stories of evangelistic outreach in Korea, the last of which had him preaching salvation to an assembled group of 300 or 400 students. At the end of his sermon this Baptist pastor had an altar call. He asked for those who had previously received Jesus to raise their hands.

All but a handful did.

He was not quite sure about this. Here he was in a pagan country, how could this be? The whole point of spending all this money and coming over there was to save souls. Not quite sure he had been translated correctly, he repeated the question. He asked “everyone who is *already* a follower of Jesus, please stand up.” Almost the whole assembly stood up. Incredulous, he said: “I couldn’t believe this because this was a Presbyterian school!?”

**A**re we Presbyterians allergic to evangelism? That Baptist pastor seems to think so ~ many others as well. A common enough opinion among Presbyterians ourselves, that we American Presbyterians are not particularly committed to evangelism.

Nevertheless, there are many Presbyterians around the globe who are profoundly evangelistic. Korean Presbyterians are often more committed to evangelistic outreach than even the most rabid American Evangelical. In the last half century,



Presbyterians in Korea have led the nation from a handful of Christians in the 1950's to more than 60% of the population today.

We Presbyterians have chosen to be a broad church, open to all theological streams, conservative, centrist, progressive all under one roof. There are many places in Africa, Asia and Latin America where being Presbyterian and being evangelical are not at all a contradiction in terms.



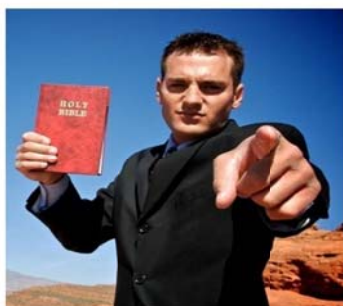
Indeed, here in the US, there are numerous evangelical Presbyterians. The most prominent Evangelical in the twentieth century, Billy Graham grew up Presbyterian. The foundation of his faith was within the Reformed community. Don't be surprised. It's a fact. Why he didn't become a

Presbyterian minister, well that's another story.

**S**outhern Baptists and other evangelical Christians believe we Presbyterians are soft on evangelism ~ and with some evidence. Many Presbyterians don't emphasize evangelism as much as some others would like us to.



Just because we Presbyterians appear weak by the standards of some American Evangelicals, doesn't mean that we are weak. Truth be told, some of us may be somewhat cool towards evangelism, because some have had unfortunate experiences of the worst excesses of destructive and aggressive styles of evangelism. I won't apologize, many of our congregations have consciously chosen to be safe havens of refuge for folks broken by bad evangelism. But allergic to evangelism? Not really.



Our dilemma as Presbyterians is we may know what we don't like, but we aren't quite sure what it is we do like. It is so easy to criticize the excesses of certain of bad evangelism, but much harder to do evangelism the Jesus way.

**W**hat if we could recover evangelism the way Jesus did it ~ the way Jesus led people into the kingdom ~ the way Jesus taught us to spread the Good News?



Our text today illustrates well a strong antihistamine for our allergic reactions to bad evangelism. Jesus didn't launch a tent revival. He didn't create a program or invent 4 spiritual laws. He didn't call in an evangelism consultant, didn't preach hellfire and damnation, didn't even hold an altar call.

# COME AND SEE

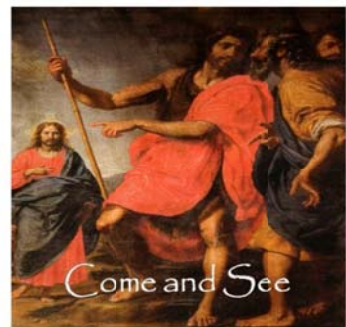
In our text today, Jesus makes it simple. Jesus just says **“Come and see.”** This invitation forms a structural backbone throughout John's Gospel.

In today's text, Andrew and another of John's disciples hear John's testimony “Ecce Agnus Dei” = “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” These two leave following John

to follow Jesus. They ask Jesus, “Where are you staying?”

Jesus says simply

- **“Come and see.”**
- Later Phillip invites Nathaniel to **“come and see”** Jesus!



- Later again the Samaritan woman at the well calls the townspeople to **“come and see”** Jesus



- Still later Jesus is invited to **“come and see”** Lazarus' tomb.



- And at the ultimate, the empty tomb, the two Mary's are invited to **“come and see,”** then commissioned to **“go and tell”** what they have seen with their own eyes.

In our passage today “faith begins by responding to the invitation to ‘**come and see.**’”<sup>2</sup> This is Christ’s way. His evangelism is inviting others to come



and see and hear and experience the mighty and marvelous things God is doing. “**Come and see**” is about being drawn by natural curiosity and attraction ~ never compelled, forced or tricked.

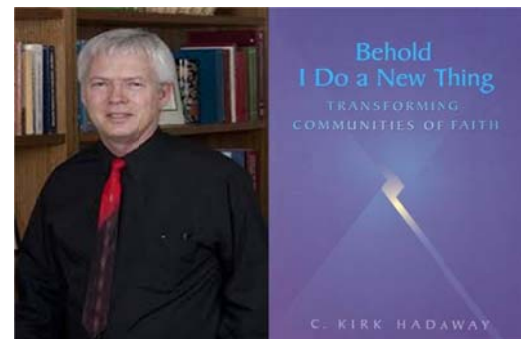
When we practice Jesus’ evangelism, we better make sure worship, what people are being invited to, is something worth “**Coming and seeing.**”

Research shows that our unending worship wars over the style of worship have little impact on attracting people. Rather it is clear the far most important factors entail worship that has “*authenticity and integrity.*”<sup>3</sup> This onus is on us who plan and lead worship. Believe me, we take this extremely seriously.

Then in the next step in evangelism, the onus is on every one of us ~ to “**go and tell**” ~ to bear witness to God-signs we have seen for ourselves and then invite others also to “**come and see**” ~ these signs of God’s realm breaking in that I gave you last week as a little homework. Evangelism is to so exude the kingdom of God, to show passion for God’s reign so clearly, that people want to become part of it.

**C** Kirk Hadaway, well respected church revitalization expert, in *Behold I Do A New Thing* has said this:

“The only effective outreach programs I have ever seen are means of channeling enthusiasm that was already there... Members are excited about what is happening to them and in their church. They want to invite people so others can see it and experience for themselves. They also may believe that the type of transformation that reordered their lives is the only hope for hurting people and a suffering world.”



For Hadaway the bottom line for our church, for any church is this and only this: *changed lives*. The Church’s only business is not what we think ~ not keeping our members satisfied. Rather it is a much more daunting task: *transformation ~ changed lives and changed societies*. Changed lives under

the transforming power of the Holy Spirit; and changed societies under the power of God's realm breaking into ours.

**W**hen persons come and see our little corner of God's kingdom, what will they see ~ the mighty and marvelous acts of God being recounted; sinners honest with themselves and God; folks loving neighbor as self? Will they see a community pointing to a living Jesus; loving mercy, doing justice and walking humbly?<sup>4</sup>



Or will they see a critical, judgmental, exclusive human community ~ just maintaining the status quo and keeping the people happy who are already here.

Will they see a warm and welcoming community centered in the living Christ? Will they see folks living in Christ's way? Will they experience God's overpowering and inclusive love for all? Will they see both changed hearts and changed societies? Will they see the reign of God or an aged, dying institution?

**B**rian Stoffregen, Lutheran pastor on his blog tells about picking up a refrigerator magnet labelled "Reality Evangelism."

- Part 1 – "Yeah, I go to church"
- Part 2 – "Wanna come?"<sup>5</sup>

What could be simpler than that.

What could be more true to evangelism in Jesus' way.

What could be easier than standing outside the empty tomb and hearing:

"Come and See ~ Go and Tell"



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<sup>1</sup> John 1:46

<sup>2</sup> Brian Stoffregen, *Gospel Notes for This Sunday* ~ 2 Epiphany A: John 1:29-42 -- Exegetical Notes, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> cf. <http://thomrainer.com/2014/04/worship-style-attracts-millennials/>

<sup>4</sup> Stoffregen, *Op.cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Stoffregen, *Op.cit.*, p. 3.