



ST. JOHN'S CHURCH

SAVANNAH

Worship in the Anglican Tradition

Ministry with Youth - Why is the Gospel “Good News?”

One of the pillars of ministry for the Youth of St. John's is the gospel. To understand its importance for youth ministry, we need to know what the gospel is.

What is the Gospel?

The gospel is good news. In 1 Corinthians 15, St. Paul informs the Corinthians that what he is about to tell them is “of first importance” so they (and we too) should listen up, because this is crucial. Paul writes, That Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures. So, the gospel is about Christ, (which means ‘anointed one’). As one pastor said, “The Gospel is of first importance because it is through the gospel that God works to take people from death to life.”

But How?

Many people have heard “Jesus died for your sins” but do not really appreciate what that means. To understand the gospel, we must first grasp that we are sinners in need of forgiveness. The Prayer Book gives us very helpful language for thinking about this. “Almighty and most merciful Father; We have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done.” Sin is not just as bad things we have done, but as a sinful heart-orientation.

How does Christ's death deal with my sin and separation from God? God is the source of life, and sin is separation from him. Sin leads ultimately to death. Jesus speaks often in the Gospel of John about the eternal life. To have eternal life is to be saved from sin and receive forgiveness and restored relationship with God now and in eternity. Christ died the death we should have died because of our sin and separation from God. Out of love God sent Christ to enter into the death we deserved and to rise again to new life so that we could live. Christ's life, death, and resurrection are given by faith through preaching and baptism as a gift of grace.

Martin Luther called Jesus' work for us “the great exchange.” In a moving passage from his writings he says, “Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation; the soul is full of sin, death, and condemnation. Let faith step in, and then sin, death, and hell will belong to Christ, and grace, life, and salvation to the soul.” Christ takes all that is ours and gives us all that is his. How amazing!

Too Much of a Good Thing?

Can you preach the gospel too much? If we tell the youth too often they have been forgiven and united to Christ in baptism they might use it as an excuse to do whatever they want. St. Paul dealt with this in Romans where he answers the question: should we keep sinning, so we can get more grace? Paul's answer is: By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness

of life. The answer is: No. You are a new person. You have a new identity. You have new life. You belong to Jesus.

The Gospel and Youth Ministry: So What?

We live in a world of image and identity. There is immense pressure on youth to look a certain way and to be a certain kind of person through performance and accomplishment. The youth (and everybody) want to be seen as smart, successful, or authentic. This pressure we all experience never relents and the rules of the game are always changing.

When the Youth of St. John's are truly captured by the grace of God in the gospel it changes things. Instead of striving to earn identity and acceptance through performance, they can receive their identity as righteous, beloved, and sons and daughters of God and co-heirs of his kingdom with Christ. All of this is a gift that cannot be earned. It allows us to live life in the world from a sense of belovedness as adopted children of God, instead of orphans looking for a place to belong. Is there any better news?