



Archbishop Stephen gave a talk at the 2022 Lambeth Conference plenary on Mission and Evangelism

Watch the plenary session on Mission and Evangelism here

First letter of Peter chapter 3 verse 14: 'Do not fear what they fear and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts, sanctify Christ as Lord and always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is within you.'

McDonalds make hamburgers.

Cadburys make chocolate

Starbucks make coffee

The Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra of Venezuela make music

Heineken make beer

Toyota make cars

Rolex make watches

Safaricom across most of Africa make connections

And sisters and brothers, the Church of Jesus Christ makes disciples.

That is our core business. That is what we are about.

Not just converts. Jesus doesn't say 'go into the world and make converts. He doesn't say go into the world and make churchgoers.

He says 'make disciples'. Followers of Jesus.

And what do disciples make?

Well...

Disciples make peace

Disciples make justice

Disciples make the kingdoms of this world the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ (see Revelation 11. 15)

We are not trying to build the earthly empire of an institution called the church. What we are about is this: Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done.

That is our prayer, and our motivation.

Disciples make disciples.

The intentional, joyful, heart changing and world changing ministry of sharing with others the good news that we have received.

We call this evangelism.

Evangelism can be a bit of a scary word, but inside the scary word evangelism you will find the lovely, beautiful word, angel. And it tells you what the word means. Sisters and brothers, my grandma came from the north of England. And she would always call me an angel. She would say ‘Stephen, be an angel put the kettle on. ‘Stephen, be an angel, run up the shops for me’.

I want to say to the bishops of the Anglican Communion, be angels, be messengers of the good news that God has lavished on us in Jesus Christ. Share with others what you have received. Bishops, evangelism is our core business too.

We are called to lead evangelising churches in a world where there is so much need and confusion and what the world needs is what God has lavished upon us in Christ.

The world needs humility - for we are destroying the earth itself.

The world needs reconciliation - because of the misuse of power and the vain glory of too many tinpot tyrants causing too much pain.

The world needs hope, what the world needs is the knowledge that peace can be found even with disagreement – and brothers and sisters isn’t this a particular opportunity before us this week, to show the world that despite profound disagreement, what we have in Christ is larger and deeper. And I want to say this: water is thicker than blood. It is our baptism that binds us together across the nations and tribes of our world. And that through our baptism we have an unbreakable belonging, because it’s made for us, in Christ, through his dying and his rising, a treasure stored up in heaven itself.

We must therefore do the work of evangelists. We bishops need to be people who always have the name of Jesus on our lips, able to give a reason for the hope that is in us.

A few years ago, I was at Paddington station in west London, on my way to Cardiff, and buying a coffee from the kiosk on the station platform.

While my coffee was being prepared a young woman turned to me, looked me up and down, and said, “What made you become a priest?”

Now this is an interesting question...

I said I had two answers: one, very short; one, slightly longer.

The short answer, is God. I thought I wouldn’t mess about, I’d cut straight to the chase.

I said to her that I believed in God and that I believed that God believed in me. That, even though I wasn't brought up going to Church, somewhere on the pathway of my life I had come to encounter God. It wasn't for me a thunderbolt conversion, nor did it mean I was unfamiliar with doubt and darkness. It's just that as I'd arrived at a point where the world made no sense without God.

Moreover, as a Christian, when I said the word 'God' I saw in my heart, I saw in my imagination, the person of Jesus. We know God because we know Jesus. Jesus is the one through whom God has a human face and a human heart. That Jesus was God speaking to us in the only language we understand: which is the language of another human life, speaking to us in our own flesh and blood.

That was the short answer! God, and God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

The slightly longer answer was that I wanted to change the world.

I said to her, I don't know what you think when you look at the world. When I look at the world, I see confusion, I see pain. And I said I want to change it.

And I said also I've got a diagnosis. I think what's wrong with the world lies with the human heart. The world needs a heart transplant. The world has a seriously bad heart condition. No, I said to her: I need a heart transplant. That I would be a better person and the world would be a better place if I had the heart of Jesus. So that's why I'm a Christian. I believe in God as I have seen Him in Jesus, and I believe that God and only God can change our hearts.

I also shared with her that when I say I believe in God I don't believe in God in quite the same way as I believe the sky is blue and the sun rises in the east. I believe in God in the way I believe that love is real, like Chopin's nocturnes make me cry. It's a different kind of reality. In fact it is more real-

This is the heart of the matter.

This is evangelism.

She then said to - often in evangelism, you're talking to somebody, and it usually is dialogue, not monologue - she said to me that when she met people of faith, she found they fitted into two categories. It either seems like their faith is like their hobby - either they go to church on Sunday but it doesn't change their life on Monday, or "they embraced their faith so tightly, it frightens everyone else away." I have seen these extremes, and she said to me 'is there another way?'

And I said to her: 'yes, there is: the way of Jesus Christ. It's the way of true humanity. I said to her that God does want to change her, but not into somebody else. God wants to change her into the person that she is meant to be. And then I look in scripture and see how what Paul says in

Athens is different to what he says in Corinth. What Jesus says to one person is different to what he says to another. And I notice that what I must not do is have a formula in my back pocket to share the Christian faith, but I must engage with people. At this point, I had to get the train. We went our different ways. But I still remember her in my prayers.

With my whole heart, my hope for the Anglican Communion and the call that I hope we make today is that the local church, the local gathered and sent out community of women and men who follow Jesus will be a place where the thousands and thousands of people growing up in our world today who do not yet know Christ - can learn and receive from him and follow in his way.

But as with that conversation, and with all evangelism, in the end people have to make their own decision about whether to follow Christ or not.

But evangelism itself, the actual business of bringing people to faith, that is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Maybe I should have said this at the beginning, because I find this enormously reassuring. God is the evangelist. God is the one who brings people to faith in Christ.

And, it is our responsibility as the evangelising Church to participate with God in God's work of bringing people to faith in Christ and to help everyone understand that they have a part to play and that they are called to be witnesses to Christ.

This is at the heart of our call today. To be intentional in the work of evangelism. That evangelism is the core business of the Church. That we understand evangelism as disciple making and therefore part of the whole mission of God to bring the whole creation to fulfilment in Christ – to change the heart of the world.

So, although I can't make someone follow Christ, I can tell them – as I told that young woman at Paddington station - why following Jesus has made a difference in my life and how I believe it can and will make a difference in our world. And we need as bishops to lead on this and help people to do it themselves. We also need to remember that probably the best definition of evangelism is simply this: one beggar telling another beggar where to get bread.

So, I can be a living signpost, pointing people to Jesus.

I can be a good companion, as Jesus was on the Emmaus Road, listening to people's questions and explaining to them the true meaning of Scripture and its relevance for their lives.

I can be the compelling storyteller, telling the story of Christ, but also the story of how God has been at work in my life.

I can be like a midwife, ensuring that all the right conditions are in place for someone to come to faith in Christ, so that the church itself is a safe place and so we understand the different ways in which different people in different contexts come to faith.

The evangelising church will know and understand this, working with the Spirit in the different ways the Spirit is at work. And we have so much to learn from one another across our Communion.

But the most important thing to learn is this. And we need to learn it afresh every single day –

In order to share the gospel of Christ, in order to be an instrument of Christ's peace in the world today, I have to receive the gospel afresh.

Being a bishop is a spiritually dangerous business. We say a lot of prayers. We preach a lot of sermons. We lead a lot of services. People treat us like we're very important, people carry our bags, drive our cars, defer to us and endlessly usher us to the top seats at the top tables. And if we allow ourselves we can be taken in by this, and after a while we will stop looking like the beggars that need the bread ourselves just as much as anyone else, and we'll start imagining we are the bakers who make the bread. We are not. We can only share what we have received.

So, I'm not standing here telling you how to do evangelism in your context, or the latest techniques to adopt. Nor am I going to try and impress you with stories of growth or scare you with stories of decline. But I do and must speak about the heart and spirit of evangelism, which is simply this: am I receiving the gospel of Jesus Christ as good news for my life? Is it the desire of my heart to share it with others? And where is the place where all my titles and entitlements and the baggage that goes with being a bishop are swept away and I am just Stephen before God? And if I don't have that place where I know my need of God, and where God's Spirit evangelises me afresh, then I'm in trouble.

The renewal of the church always flows from the spiritual renewal of our life in Christ. We must, therefore, pay attention to the spiritual disciplines that shape and sustain the Christian life: the life of prayer, the reading of scripture; the sacramental life. And we give from the overflow of what we have received. Therefore, if as bishops we want to lead our church in evangelism, we must also lead them in prayer and lead them to a deeper encounter with God.

But I don't mean we have to do one before the other. The best way to grow in your faith is to share it with someone else. But I do mean that we must understand the intimate relationship between spirituality, evangelism and discipleship. They belong together and if they get separated our evangelism simply evaporates away.

So I invite you in your dioceses to lead your people to a deeper encounter with God so that they will have something to share, that it will overflow into witnessing in their daily lives. It will overflow into building places in our churches where people can learn and understand the faith. It will always lead to word and sacrament. But it must also understand the different ways that different people come to faith. Some people have

Damascus Road experience coming to faith suddenly. Some have Emmaus Road experiences coming to faith gradually. The evangelising church will accompany people on these different ways.

And leading by example, we bishops must know ourselves to be the beloved of Christ, his disciples before we are his bishops. We must teach and preach and give time for evangelistic mission across our dioceses. But also lead its spiritual renewal.

So, my advice to myself, when it comes to evangelism, is this: Stephen, receive the gospel each day. Let it transform your life. Remember that you are a sinner in need of God's grace. Today and every day. Then share that with others. Point the way to Christ and be humble before him. Build a church where those who are formed in Christ are also sent out to live and proclaim the gospel, a truly apostolic church. And finally remember, that the gospel needs to be shared with cultures and tribes and nations as well as with individuals. Because our core business is making disciples – people whose lives are conformed to Christ and are participating in God's mission of love to the world - then the other things that concern us at this Lambeth Conference, like living with disagreement, like seeking carbon net zero, these may turn out to be the very best things we do for evangelism, because if we can do these things the world will look at us and say, these followers of Jesus they live differently, and the lives they lead align with the words they say. They love one another. They care for the earth. They seek peace. Please show us this Jesus you follow.

Inside the slightly scary word 'evangelism' hides the beautiful word 'angel'. Let us release that word and be messengers of the gospel of Jesus Christ in our dioceses and across our world.

Brothers and sisters...

Tyrants make trouble.

Vagabonds make mischief.

The devil loves nothing better than making mayhem and chaos.

But the Church of Jesus Christ declares the praises of him who brought us out of darkness into marvellous light (see 1 Peter 2. 9).

We make disciples.

And disciples make peace.

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