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Saint John's Episcopal Church
Sandwich, Massachusetts 02563

February 6, 2011
Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany
Annual Meeting Day

Today's sermon is taken from the Epistle 1st Corinthians Chapter 2, verses 1-12

O God, we come together because we need you, we need one another, and we need to hear your word; and if we hear it here, let us become so possessed by it that we become servants of it out in your world. Amen

On these cold and bleak days it's good to sit down and read something that makes you chuckle. I want to share with you the story of a woman who tells about her five-year-old son playing in his first neighborhood softball game. The little guy named Frankie stepped up the plate while his dad shouted instructions from the sidelines, and mom and dad both cheered excitedly when Frankie clouted the ball well out into right field. Charged with excitement the youngster scampered around first base, then rounded second. Then, confused by so much shouting, he hesitated on third base and seemed not to know what to do next. "Run home, Frankie!" his dad screamed, wanting desperately to see him score. "Run home! Run home! With that Frankie turned, and he scooted across left field, squeezed through the fence and disappeared. (hearty laughter) They found Frankie later, sitting in the kitchen of the family home.

Well, he did just as his dad had instructed him to do. His father yelled, "Run home!" and that's exactly what he did. His father needed to be a little clearer in what he was directing him to do.

Most of you are familiar with the little acronym K I S S. It's one that Allen Swain taught me a number of years ago -- Keep It Simple Stupid. I suspect that there are two inscriptions that ought to be on every pulpit. The first is from John 12, verse 20. "Sir or madam, we would see Jesus." And the second is: K I S S -- keep it simple stupid. If you think that the "KISS" approach to preaching is a little too unsophisticated for a learned church like ours, let me hasten to say to you that the idea is not my own. Listen as the Apostle Paul

describes his own efforts at communicating the gospel in today's epistle. "When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaim to you the testimony about God, for I resolve to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear and with much trembling. My message and preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power."

Now, St. Paul is not saying he dumbed down the gospel. Anyone who had spent much time deciphering St. Paul's theology knows that his theology can be quite challenging at times; almost mind boggling. But he is saying that he tried to communicate the gospel to the churches in which he ministered as simply and as directly as he could. He was not trying to impress people with his knowledge, but with God's love and God's power. Indeed I believe that from these words he too would encourage those two inscriptions on every pulpit: "We would see Jesus," and "KISS," Keep It Simple Stupid.

"For I resolve to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear and much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power."

If you have experienced the power of God in your life, you don't have to hide behind some pretty language. St. Paul had no reason to hide behind pretty language. He had experienced Jesus' power in his own life. All he had to do was testify to that experience.

It is like a humble couple who had only recently dedicated themselves to Jesus. They were good people with one weakness; they were illiterate, they could not read. However, they did not allow this limitation keep them from getting involved in the Christian community. They met on a regular basis with a group of other believers all of whom dressed alike while engaged in a certain project. The men all wore red shirts when working on this project, so the woman made a red shirt for her husband. He came back from the meeting, however, with a look of disappointment on his face because the other men had a message printed on their shirts, but he did not. Of course, he had no idea what the message said since he could not read, but it bothered him that his shirt bore no message. His wife, undaunted by her inability to read, decided to sew a message on his shirt as well. She chose three words which she copied

from a sign in a store window across the street. Neither she nor her husband knew what the words meant, but he wore his newly-lettered shirt to the next meeting. Afterwards, he came home bubbling with joy. He said all of the men really liked the inscription because it so aptly described the wonderful change they have seen in my life. It turned out that his wife had sewn these words that she had seen on a store on her husband's shirt: "Under New Management." (hearty laughter) I guess that kinda says it all. Since they had met Jesus, their lives were "under new management."

You don't have to be the world's smartest person, a genius, a rocket scientist, to testify to the power of God in your life. If Jesus has touched you, healed you, given you a reason to go on; if you're "under new management," tell that story to others. And I know you all do that; that's how we get new members. Tell it plainly, tell it simply, so no one can misunderstand.

We all know that communication in our world is difficult. Yes, we have smart phones, and we have computers, and we have all kinds of ways of communicating, but communication is difficult. Not only communication from this pulpit, but communication in marriage, communication in the workplace, and communication in school, and communication in friendships, and communication between cultures and countries, and communication even in the church. Communication is difficult.

During court one day, the judge quietly passed the clerk a note reading, "Blind on right side, may be falling. Please call someone." Understandably alarmed, the clerk called for help and while waiting for the help to come he reassuringly whispered to the judge that paramedics were on their way and would arrive shortly. Puzzled, the judge pointed to a sagging Venetian blind on the right side of the courtroom and explained: "I was thinking maybe that someone would come from maintenance." (laughter)

Communication is difficult; however, effective communication, I think, and I know you know it, is critical. How many marriages fail because couples lose the ability to communicate? How many families are in distress because parents and offspring fail to communicate? How many hurting people could be helped if someone would simply take the time to communicate with them? Communication is difficult, but communication is also critical in living together in families and as communities and as churches.

And here's the final thing I want to say. Communication of the gospel is our

primary responsibility as Christians. What was Jesus' final instruction to his disciples? "Go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I commanded you."

I believe with all my heart that this is our primary task as believers in Jesus. We are to communicate the Good News. There are many ways of communicating: I can preach, I can teach, but the best ways to communicate require very few words. Listening is probably the most powerful form of communication. Listening to your spouse, listening to your children, listening to the concerns of your neighbor, listening to friends, listening to each other in church. We communicate by listening, and we communicate by the way we live.

As the old ditty goes, "I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day." The important thing to realize is that you don't have to be a scholar to tell the Good News of Jesus. You don't have to be a person of great eloquence, or education, or even intelligence. If you experience Jesus' power in your life, tell it! If you have Jesus' love in your heart, live it! **K I S S: Keep It Simple *Saint*.**

Amen

Transcribed by Phyllis K. Briggs