A Shot of Good News

Ephesians 2:8

3/7/21

It seems in the current day we live, that all we hear is bad news. Whether you see it on the new, read it on the internet, or it pops up on your phone bad news seems to trump the headlines. But today with all that is going on, I want to give you a Shot of Good News!

Have you heard the good news? Mark starts off his gospel with the announcement of the coming of the good news. He reveals to us the content and the nature of that good news. It is "the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

Prior to Christmas, this is what the Advent is all about -- the preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ. This good news is centered in Jesus Christ. This is the mood and feeling that is captured by the song “Go Tell It on The Mountain”
*Go tell it on the mountain,
over the hills and everywhere;
Go tell it on the mountain,
that Jesus Christ is born*.

The good news is that Jesus was born in an obscure village in an out-of-the-way place that was shadowy, barren and unknown. Today, Christ comes to the shadowy and barren places of our hearts & lives. This is the good news!

* Jesus was born amid the poverty and obscurity of those Judean hills, but the fact remains that he transformed human life in the first century. It all began in such lowliness and simplicity. Today Christ comes to those shadowy and barren places of our lives and brings the light of God's love and grace.
* It was good news for the first century and it is good news for our century. This is the hope and joy of the Gospel message. This is the good news! In Bethlehem heaven touched the earth as never before. Today, the good news of the gospel touches our hearts and lives with the announcement that God is with us.
* Jesus walked along the shores of Galilee, but the good news is that today he walks our city streets. He is with us amid life's strains and stresses.

Ready for some Good News?

**God Is Personal and Close**
Again, look at the humble setting where this message of good news first appeared. It did not appear to have a ghost of a chance of surviving. The birth of Jesus took place in a tiny country.

* Palestine is only about 150 miles from north to south. It is about the size of the state of New Hampshire. How could the good news that came to that community ever become good news for all the world today?
* Jesus was born into a Jewish family. Palestine was inhabited by Jews, but the Jews deliberately isolated themselves from other cultures and other communities. How could good news that came to a country which had a deliberate policy of isolation be good news for all the world?
* The good news first appeared to the Jews, but at the time the Jews were under Roman occupation. During their entire history they rarely knew what freedom and independence were. How could this good news that came to those who were so isolated and occupied by a foreign power ever be good news for all the world?

The answer is simple.

* The message of the good news of Jesus Christ is one that is about personal relationships. It is about the relationship between women, men, and God. Personal relationships don't change. Love, hate, honor, and loyalty remain the same. Jesus came to meet the basic human needs of the first century and our century. Jesus entered into life "then and there," and "here and now."
* Jesus met the needs of the first century world, and the good news is he meets the needs of those in today's world. As American biblical scholar Walter Wink reminds us in his powerful book, Engaging the Powers, "Jesus identifies today with every victim of torture, incest, or rape; with every single one of the forty thousand children who die each day of hunger . . .with the Alzheimer's patient who is slowly losing the capacity of recognition and the AIDS patient who is barely holding on to life". The good news is that in Jesus God became flesh and knows life exactly as we know it, every pain, every tear, every aspect. Emmanuel, truly God is with us. That is the good news.

**God of Compassion and Concern**
The message of the good news of Jesus was earthshaking for the first century world. They had never heard such a teaching about God. For the first century Greek mind, the idea of God was one of absolute serenity, which nothing in heaven or earth could affect. They saw life in terms of a God who was serene, isolated, untouchable and freed from all feeling and emotion. For the Stoics, God was by nature incapable of feeling. In the first century world, the idea of God was one of detachment and indifference to human need.

The difference that good news in Jesus Christ made to the people of the first century was to reveal a God who cares desperately, a God who is involved in human situations. Against the backdrop of this first century world that considered all the deities as being insulated from human need and emotionless to human concern comes the good news of Jesus Christ. The Good News is that when you look at Jesus, you see God. When you listen to Jesus, you hear God. Not because he has taken God's place, but because he is the clear window; God has glazed into flesh and blood -- the porthole between this world and the next, the passageway between heaven and earth". That was good news for the first century world and that is good news for our world.

Never before had God been defined in such loving, kind, gracious, and caring terms. This was unthinkable for the first century world to whom Mark was writing his gospel. It seemed incomprehensible to those of Mark's day that the Son of God would be born of a woman in the tiny village of Bethlehem in a stable cave on a cold winter's night. But the apostle stated this event in terms that are true for all ages when he declared "that . . . in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

**God is Grace**
The primary expression of this good news is grace. God through grace has taken the initiative to bring this world back to God. In the birth of Jesus, a relationship between God and humankind has been made possible. It can never be earned, since it is a result of grace; it can only be received. Our scripture text says, ***“God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God***.” In fact, grace cannot really be described as it can be experienced. It is more "caught" than "taught." It is defined in the scriptures as "steadfast love." Therefore, as "steadfast love," it is reliable, constant and trustworthy -- the very thing that is needed in our lives today.

Grace has been defined as love in action. That is a good definition of the grace of God. It is love in action. The Bible clearly points out that God's relationship with men and women is not based on the fact that we offer something to God, but on the fact that God offers everything to us. God offers love to us not because we are good or great, but simply because God is love. The gift of love...That is the kind of God God is.

What surprises us about God's grace is the notion that God should take on flesh and dwell among us. What a surprise that the Son of God was born into a lower-class Jewish family living on the fringe of poverty and obscurity and was permitted to die in disgrace as a common criminal! That is the surprising way that God, through grace, chose to do it.

The fact is we should always surprise by grace. Because it is God's grace, it comes to us on God's terms. Grace is the unmerited, unearned, undeserved goodness of God that is showered upon our lives. In the Old Testament, God loves and chooses Israel to reveal God's purpose and will. Not because Israel is good or great. God does not need Israel or depend on her. Yet God loves Israel. Why? Because it is God's nature to love. What can be said of Israel can be said of us. Why does God love us? Simply because God is love. There is no other reason to explain why God should take the risk. This is the surprising nature of God's grace.

**God's Love Is Persistent**
The book of Mark opens with the declaration: "the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ." Here we discover God's love in action in the life of Jesus. The whole Bible is a commentary on the grace of God which seeks to save.

* Why wasn't Israel given up as hopeless because of her constant bickering, criticism, and failure?
* Why wasn't Jacob cast out on the scrap heap for his warped and twisted ways?
* Why wasn't David disowned by God for the dark and degrading deed that made his name a byword in the land?
* Why wasn't Peter left to sink after his denial?
* Why wasn't Saul of Tarsus, persecutor, blasphemer, hater of Christ, blotted out of the Book of Life forever?

Why is it that God has not given up on us? We have spurned God's love, polluted God's creation, and mocked God's purpose with cruel acts of inhumanity. Why doesn't God just go ahead and allow us to self-destruct? Because there is nothing in heaven or on earth so determined, stubborn, and persistent as the grace of God that wills to save.

Georgia Preacher, Tom Long asks the question in his book Shepherds and Bathrobes: "Have you ever noticed where God placed his treasure that he was seeking to deposit on the earth?" The treasure is not gold, but gospel. Not silver, but good news. Not hard, cold cash, but grace, love, and peace.

* God could have left it with the politicians, those who are responsible for collecting taxes, building schools, and passing laws, but God didn't.
* God could have left this treasure with Zechariah, the high priest, but his unbelief took him out of the picture.
* God left the treasure in the least likely of places: in the love, care, and nurture of a first century peasant woman chosen as the "handmaiden of the Lord." God's treasure was left with the most powerless figure in the ancient world. Doesn't that tell you something about God's grace in today's world?

We are constantly surprised by grace. Grace may be surprising, but grace is always amazing.

* God comes to us in the most unlikely place -- Bethlehem.
* God comes through the most unlikely of people -- Mary.
* God comes to us under the most unlikely circumstances -- the poverty of the Judean hills.
* Today, God through Christ comes again to the most unlikely people -- you and me.
* God comes to us at the level of our need. Knowing that we cannot go where God is, God comes to us where we are.

This is what Mark calls "the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ." And this is the good news that we have today! Let us not become distracted with all the bad news of the world but remain focused and reminded of the Good News to which we have in our hearts to share with others today!