**Telling Good News**

2-4-24

Horseheads First UMC

Sermon Theme: We often forget that the basis for our faith is actually **Good News**. According to the old prophet Isaiah, God is never weary even when we are weary. And God is more than willing to give strength to everyone who prays and waits for it. We might feel down in the gutters but God can make us fly like Eagles! Why does God make us wait for strength? Perhaps God wants to develop patience and trust in our lives. St. Paul writes to the Corinthian church that he must preach the **Good News**, which he knows in Christ Jesus. He writes that he does anything necessary to get **Good News** through to people, becoming like them in their status, role, race and strength level. How do you view your faith? Is it a struggle or a blessing? Are you willing to reach people where they are to let God’s **Good News** lift them up? Are you willing to be partners with God in this work? We are all called into service together.

Isaiah 40:27-31

**27**Why do you say, O Jacob,  
    and speak, O Israel,  
‘My way is hidden from the Lord,  
    and my right is disregarded by my God’?  
**28**Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
The Lord is the everlasting God,  
    the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He does not faint or grow weary;  
    his understanding is unsearchable.  
**29**He gives power to the faint,  
    and strengthens the powerless.  
**30**Even youths will faint and be weary,  
    and the young will fall exhausted;  
**31**but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,  
    they shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
they shall run and not be weary,  
    they shall walk and not faint.

I Corinthians 9:16-23

**16**If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for ***an obligation*** is laid on me, and ***woe betide me*** if I do not proclaim the gospel! (“*I’m in trouble if I don’t preach the gospel.” CEB)* **17**For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with ***a commission***. **18**What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of ***my rights in the gospel***. **19**For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might ***win*** ***(recruit, CEB) more of them***. **20**To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to ***win(recruit, CEB)*** Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might ***win*** ***(recruit, CEB)*** those under the law. **21**To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law) so that I might ***win(recruit, CEB)*** those outside the law. **22**To the weak I became weak, so that I might ***win*** ***(recruit, CEB)*** the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I might by any means ***save some***. **23**I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings. *(****23 “****All the things I do are for the sake of the gospel, so I can be a partner with it.” CEB)*

Sermon Start:

Perhaps you’ve heard this phrase before: ***“You had One Job!”*** (show pictures)

Here are a few examples of people who messed up their one important task.

A stack of cardboard boxes

Description automatically generated A red door with a sign on it

Description automatically generated A close-up of a building

Description automatically generated

According to St. Paul in the letter to the church at Corinth, he had one job and that was to win souls to Christ; to “recruit them” is another translation (Common English Bible). In fact, he uses himself as an example of what each and every Christian should be doing, when he talks about his duty to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. To the slave he presents the fact of himself being bound to serve Christ, so that in a *mutual experience* the slave might listen to and be persuaded to accept the Good News of Christ. To the Jew, he follows closely the Jewish laws so he has an opportunity to have his Good News accepted by Jews. To the Greeks, same story. To weak people, he will even show his weakness more so that in that camaraderie, the weak will come to trust the Good News of Christ. Paul was the ultimate Evangelist.

And you, like Paul are also an evangelist.

This is a radical message for mainstream Christianity in America in the 21st century! For example, I like the comfort of our faith. I enjoy the freedom we have today, in this nation, to worship without interference or judgment from others. I cherish the relationships we have with our regulars: people who grew up in the faith and those who have come in and found a spiritual home through the relationships found in the family of God.. in this place.

One example of this comforting message of our faith is found in today’s reading from Isaiah, where he outlines to a troubled nation (way back when) that God strengthens the weak empowers the exhausted and never disappoints people who wait for Him to act. That message was first spoken to people who had been taken away from their homeland, they prayed unceasingly for divine help, and felt like a beaten down nation. It came at just the right time and in the right way, giving so much hope that we still read it today and take comfort.

Have you ever been weak? Exhausted? Without hope? This part of the Good News is the most powerful promise of God there is: You will be strengthened by God.

But St. Paul also knows that when we follow Christ we give up all the claims we once had to “personal comfort.” He talks in this chapter about pummeling his flesh (pushing down his natural desires for pay, for food, for comfort) so that he might be found faithful in sharing Good News. He writes to the Corinthian church stating he is among the servants of God who should be paid but will not push that point with them. He will preach to them about Christ *no matter what* and the message he will bring has the power to win and save souls.

As I was reading one commentary about this passage, I read that only God saves souls and therefore Paul could not do that. I agree of course, that God is the agent, always working behind the scenes to turn people’ hearts to God. But the message of Christ and his salvation must be carried to people by people. The word Evangelist is literally “a Good News Carrier.”

And you who have come to know Christ, to be forgiven from your sins and to live a new life in Him, are automatically carriers of Good News. How you go about sharing it will vary from person to person, but “evangelist” is part of your identity as a follower Christ.

How can you live this out?

**Friendship** Evangelism. “Make a friend, be a friend, win a friend to Christ.” Paul says we can “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15)

Mark Connolly, "The Value of Friendship," Spirituality for Today, February, 2000:

*“Every friendship enriches your personality. It gives you insight into the life of another who has been led by the Holy Spirit. A solid friendship enables you to realize that in the presence of your friend your secrets as well as your sins are sacred. Friendship is an antidote for boredom and loneliness, but also a quality that enables you to grow up in the friendship of God and in the sight of your neighbor.”*

**Witness** Evangelism. ***15****Your heart should be holy and set apart for the Lord God. Always be ready to tell everyone who asks you why you believe as you do. Be gentle as you speak and show respect. (I Pe. 3:15)*

How can you be carry Good News and look glum all the time?

Garrison Keiler published a book last year (2023) titled Cheerfulness.

He writes that *“happiness”* is circumstantial, *“bliss”* is brief, *“delight”* is inexplicable, *“contentment”* is lovely but easily broken, etc., etc. In contrast, he states, *cheerfulness* is a simple option that can be put into practice every day, even by those who can make a long list of “evils and perils and injustices in the world.”

[“Guest columnist Allen Woods: Remaining cheerful in a grim world,” a review of Garrison Keillor’s book, Cheerfulness (Prairie Home Productions, 2023), in the Daily Hampshire Gazette, August 24, 2023.}

How do you come across to other people? Are you the one pulling people up out of their despair, or are you usually dragged down, pulling others down into the abyss? Attitude you can control. Outlook you can decide upon. Circumstance you cannot, but you can have hope in your heart and live with cheerfulness.

You are a witness for Christ, or a witness for despair. It is up to you how you choose to live your life in front of others.

Don’t be embarrassed by your message. -Hugh Hewitt, *The Embarrassed Believer* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), 45.

*“The most joyful Christians are those who do not worry a bit about what the world thinks but who concern themselves continually with what God thinks. That approach, I assure you, leaves little room for embarrassment. . . .  
  
Here's a blunt warning: You can do a lot more harm than good by bold professions of Christian belief at the wrong time, in the wrong place or in the wrong manner.  
  
And that's the tension. We are called to witness for Christ, but we are warned not to call the church into public disgrace. There is a way to do both. And it requires both some work and a whole bunch of community.”*

**World** Evangelism. “Until all come to know…”

*I Timothy 2:**First of all, I ask you to pray much for all men and to give thanks for them.****2****Pray for kings and all others who are in power over us so we might live quiet God-like lives in peace.****3****It is good when you pray like this. It pleases God Who is the One Who saves.****4****He wants all people to be saved from the punishment of sin. He wants them to come to know the truth.****5****There is one God. There is one Man standing between God and men. That Man is Christ Jesus.****6****He gave His life for all men so they could go free and not be held by the power of sin. God made this known to the world at the right time.****7****This is why I was chosen to be a teacher and a missionary. I am to teach faith and truth to the people who do not know God. I am not lying but telling the truth.*

There is a "Peanuts" comic strip in which Linus is listening carefully as his sister, Lucy, boasts about her religious faith and her potential as an evangelist.  
  
She says to Linus: "I could be a terrific evangelist. Do you know that kid who sits behind me in school? ***I convinced him that my religion is better than his religion."***  
Linus asks: "How did you do that?"  
  
Lucy replies: ***"I hit him with my lunch box."***

Wouldn’t it be nice if every time we wanted to become more, we became less? If, when we wanted to “Lord it over” someone, we instead “Bent down to serve them?” Jesus said whoever is the greatest among his disciples should become the least; that he gave an example to them by washing their feet.

This is world evangelism. How we bring Good News makes all the difference. The world is watching us. How will we share God’s news?