

Bad News, Good News

Luke 24: 13-35

"I've got some good news and some bad news to tell you. Which would you like to hear first?" the farmer asked.

"Why don't you tell me the bad news first?" the banker replied.

"Okay," said the farmer, **"With the bad drought and inflation and all, I won't be able to pay anything on my mortgage this year, either on the principal or the interest."**

"Well, that is pretty bad," said the banker.

"It gets worse," said the farmer. **"I also won't be able to pay anything on the loan for all that machinery I bought, not on the principal or interest."**

"Wow, is that ever bad!" the banker admitted.

"It's worse than that," the farmer continued. **"You remember I also borrowed to buy seed and fertilizer and other supplies. Well, I can't pay anything on that either "principal or interest."**

"That's awful," said the banker, **"and that's enough! What's the good news?"**

"The good news," replied the farmer with a smile, **"is that I intend to keep on doing business with you."**

Two of the disciples of Jesus were on the road that leads to Emmaus. They were feeling as low as that farmer - if not lower. Puzzling things were going on that they did not understand. Their Master had been crucified like a common thief. They all had scattered like frightened sheep. Now there were reports that their Master was not dead at all. Reliable sources told them that he had appeared to some of their most trusted friends. Was it real? Was he really alive? The disciples were troubled and afraid. Should they believe the good news or the bad news? That is our dilemma today, isn't it?

I. DO WE BELIEVE THE GOOD NEWS OR THE BAD NEWS? The good news is that Christ is alive!
The bad news is how little impact that fact is having in the world today.

For example, how do we explain this? Anthropologist Phillip Walker has studied the bones of more than 4,000 children from hundreds of pre-industrial cultures, dating back to 4,000 B.C. He has yet to find ANY evidence of "battered-child syndrome". In some modern societies, Walker estimates, evidence of battering would be found on more than 1 in 20 children who die between the ages of one and four TODAY. Walker suggests a couple of possibilities: 1) unwanted children in primitive societies were often killed at birth, rather than resented and brutalized for years; 2) the public nature of primitive child rearing, notably the watchful eyes aunts, uncles, grandparents or friends prevented child abuse. In the ancestral environment, there was little mystery about what went on behind closed doors because there weren't any closed doors.

There is a growing evidence that in the midst of our affluence; in the midst of our impressive military power; notwithstanding our growing technological prowess; at our very heart we are a sick society. Some commentators are predicting that "as people go into their cocoons and lose human contact except that provided by a TV screen and/or a computer modem" we will become an even less caring and more violent society.

Here is an article taken from Friday's Houston Chronicle, April 4, 2008, page A3. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the first national estimate of child abuse for the year 2006, reported that among the nation's youngest, most vulnerable children under the age of one year, 91,278 children were abused. 39% of them (35,455) were less than one month old. But that is not the statistic that blows my mind. Of those 35,455 who were less than one month old, more than 84% of them (29,881) were less than one week old. Most of the abuse cases (68%) were considered merely neglect not physical abuse. Although the report does not cover fatalities, officials estimated that abuse killed an additional 499 children less than one year of age.

I don't want to sound pessimistic this morning, but the disparity is startling. On one hand is the good news of Christ. On the other hand, is the bad news of the world. It is just as easy today to be confused and troubled even as these two disciples of Jesus were confused and troubled as they walked the road to Emmaus that day.

As they were making their journey, they were trying to make sense of their situation trying to make sense of their world. Many of us have been there, haven't we? Many of us are there today, aren't we?

II. THEN JESUS COMES TO THEM. This is significant. Jesus doesn't wait for them to find him. Jesus comes to them.

The picture we have in the New Testament is of a God who pursues us. Christ comes to the two disciples. He walks with them and interprets Scripture for them. They do not recognize him, but please notice that it is Christ who took the initiative.

We need to hear this word about the Christ who comes to us. Often we think we must pound on Heaven's door to get God's attention. We act as if ...

"If I just pray often enough, if I just get on my knees, if I just clean up my life, if I just serve the church, then maybe God will notice my situation, maybe then Christ give me some attention."

The picture the New Testament gives us is not of our pounding on God's door, but of Christ gently knocking on ours. We are the ones with an attention problem. Christ continually comes to us, but like those two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we do not recognize him.

There is a story of a British soldier in the First World War who lost heart for the battle and deserted. Trying to reach the coast, in the pitch-black night, to find a boat back to England, he became hopelessly lost. In the dark, he came across what he thought was a signpost. It was so dark that he began to climb the post so that he could read it. As he reached the top, he struck a match to see and found himself looking squarely into the face of Jesus Christ. He realized that, rather than running into a signpost, he had climbed a roadside crucifix. Then he remembered the One who had died for him . . . who had endured . . . who had never turned back. The next morning the soldier was back with his company in the trenches.

Maybe that's what you and I need to do in the moments of our distress and darkness - strike a match in the darkness and look on the face of Jesus Christ. For Christ is here. He comes to us just

as he came to those two disciples on the road to Emmaus even though we may not recognize him. He takes the initiative. He knocks on the door.

When the two disciples arrived at Emmaus, they were so captivated by their new friend whose identity they did not know, that they begged him to stay with them. He did. Then something very beautiful and mysterious happened. While they were having the evening meal, Christ broke the bread, just as he had done at the last meal they had shared together. He blessed the bread, suddenly, Luke tells us, “...***their eyes were opened and they recognized him***”.

When they realized who he was, they began to recall how much they had received as Christ had interpreted the scriptures to them on the road from Jerusalem. Then they jumped up and hurried off to tell their story to the rest of the disciples. Now here is what we can't afford to miss:

III. CHRIST REVEALS HIMSELF TO US THROUGH HEARING THE WORD AND BREAKING OF THE BREAD. That is why we come to worship. Christ is continually coming to us, but we may not recognize who he is. However, when we read and hear his Word; when we participate in the Sacraments of his church, we come to recognize who he is.

Our tendency is to look for Christ in the extraordinary, the spectacular, and the breathtaking. Remember in SUPERMAN: THE MOVIE when Superman first reveals his superpowers to the world? Lois Lane is dangling from a cable, high atop the Daily Planet building, screaming at the top of her lungs. Just as she begins her long fall to earth, Superman changes into his flashy red, yellow, and blue outfit and swoops up to catch her in midair. **"Don't worry, Miss"**, he assures her, **"I've got you"**.

"You've got me," she exclaims. **"Who's got you?"**

Just then, the helicopter that has been perched on the edge of the building begins to fall straight toward them and the crowd below. Superman merely grabs it with his one free arm and gently sets both it and Lois safely back on the landing pad. When he turns to leave, an astonished Lois stammers out the words, **"Who ARE you?"**

"A friend," Superman replies warmly, and as he flies straight up into the air with a sort of half twist

Lois faints in a heap.

That's the way we would like for Christ to come to us. And that is why we often miss him. Christ reveals himself as he has always revealed himself through the Word and through the Sacraments - through the study of Scripture and the breaking of Bread. That is why when we need encouragement we go to our Bibles and we come to our church. Because there, Christ is revealed in all His glory.

So, what do you do when the world assaults you with bad news? What do you do when you feel all alone and feel as if you have lost contact with Christ? How do you experience Christ's presence and encouragement once more? Millions of Christians have found comfort in these two primary means of Grace: Studying God's Word and celebrating Christ's presence with other Christians in the breaking of the bread and taking the cup in the Lord's Supper. Christ is revealed when we experience his presence in sacred moments. We are then empowered to go into the world to tell our friends the GOOD NEWS and to live it in our lives.

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