

THE MESSAGE

June 6, 2010

Matthew 10:1-16

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Family News – Good News

Bill received an envelope in the mail that read, “Good news! You’ve been pre-approved for a Visa card.” Bill had just turned 20. He would begin college in the fall and was thinking about applying for his first credit card. He also had his eye on a new guitar but didn’t have enough money to pay for it. So Bill applied for the credit card. Unfortunately, he didn’t read the fine print. When that credit card arrived in the mail, he discovered that he had been charged a \$200 application fee, and the credit limit on the card was only \$250. Not everything that claims to be good news is really good news!

Good news – that’s our topic for today. In our Bible reading from Matthew, Jesus sends his disciples out on their first missionary journey. Among other things, they are to **go out and proclaim the good news to people**.

I wonder how the average Christian would describe the good news, what do you think they would say? My guess is that a majority of Christians would say the good news goes something like this: **“Jesus died on the cross for our sins, and so anyone who believes will be forgiven and go to heaven.”** That *is* good news. But is it, THE good news? I don’t think so!

That’s not to say that the message of the cross isn’t good news – it certainly is! But it is not THE good news, at least not the good news that Jesus sent his disciples to proclaim. Why do I say that? Two reasons:

First, Jesus hadn’t died yet. The disciples couldn’t possibly proclaim the cross of Christ and him crucified. He was still alive.

Second, that isn’t the good news Jesus told the disciples to proclaim. Jesus said to his disciples, “As you go, proclaim the good news, **‘the Kingdom of heaven (God) has come near.’**” *That’s* the good news. That’s the message we are sent to proclaim.

In Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke – called the synoptic Gospels because they contain similar material – we find a common pattern. 1) Jesus is baptized by John and then 2) driven into the wilderness for a time of testing. 3) At the end of that wilderness period his public ministry begins, and 4) it begins with the same proclamation of good news: **“Repent, for the Kingdom of God has come near.”**

The Kingdom of God is not a life in heaven after we die. It includes that but the Kingdom is a reality that Jesus announces right here, right now, in this life. It’s already here but not yet fully here. The Kingdom of God is here already and will be fully revealed when Jesus comes again. And it involves all of creation.

In the Kingdom of God, Jesus is Lord and King. Now whenever a new king arrives, the rules of the kingdom change. Jesus has changed all the rules. (Side note: if someone asks you to share one thing about today's sermon you can tell them this – Jesus has changed all the rules.) In his kingdom everything is turned upside down. Consider these:

- * The first shall be last and the last shall be first.
- * Greatness is measured by selfless service.
- * The poor and humble are honored and the wealthy and proud are brought low.
- * Generosity prevails.
- * Enemies are loved.
- * Forgiveness flows freely.
- * Worry takes a backseat to trust.
- * Hearts are made pure.
- * Judging others is unwelcomed.
- * Actions speak louder than words.

In God's Kingdom **mercy and love and justice are the core values**. All are welcomed! That's the basis for the charter, for the constitution in this new Kingdom.

Point of clarification, the good news is not *the Kingdom has come*. The good news is, *with Jesus, the Kingdom comes*. Jesus ushers in this new Kingdom; so without Jesus there is no Kingdom. This Kingdom isn't something we create or build. It's something we are invited to participate in, by invitation, making the Kingdom a gift of grace.

It's a life-long relationship with Jesus who makes all things possible. In a world filled with hurt and hostility, this is good news indeed. The answer to all of our world problems is Jesus and his way of life. (This is the second thing you can tell people you heard in today's sermon - The answer to all of our world problems is Jesus and his way of life.) He is the perfect Lord and the perfect King to follow.

Oddly enough, Jesus never said exactly what the Kingdom of God is. Instead he tells stories/parables that describe what the Kingdom of God is like. For example:

The Kingdom of God is like a farmer sowing seeds everywhere. Not every seed grows, but, by God's grace, the harvest is abundant.

The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, or like yeast in bread. Seemingly small and hidden, but it grows in powerful and mysterious ways.

The Kingdom of God is like a vineyard where the owner invites anyone and everyone to labor, and his generosity flies in the face of our sense of fairness.

The Kingdom of God is like a treasure in a field, or like the finest pearl. Its value is so much greater than anything we could possibly have.

The Kingdom of God is like a wedding banquet where one and all are invited to attend and it's a grand party.

Jesus told stories/parables to help people participate in the Kingdom of God. It's not only about getting people to heaven after they die it's about a living relationship with Jesus right here, right now. It's about bringing heaven to earth. If heaven is the place where God's will is done, then we pray with Jesus: "May your Kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Question: how might we respond to the incredible reality that the Kingdom of God is here right now... how might we proclaim it? **Answer:** we live differently... we live for others and not ourselves. It looks something like this:

One day a father and his mentally and physically challenged son, Shay, walked past a park where some boys that Shay knew were playing baseball. Shay asked his father, "Do you think they'll let me play?" His father knew that most of the boys would not want someone like Shay on their team, but he also understood that if Shay were allowed to play, it would give him a sense of belonging and some confidence to be accepted by others in spite of his disabilities.

His father asked one of the boys on the field if Shay could play. The boy looked around and said, "We're losing by six runs and the game is in the eighth inning. I guess he can be on our team and we'll try to put him in, in the ninth inning."

Shay struggled over to the team's bench and, with a broad smile, put on a team shirt. The father watched with a small tear in his eye and warmth in his heart. The boys saw the father's joy at his son being accepted.

In the bottom of the eighth inning, Shay's team scored a few runs but they were still behind by three.

In the top of the ninth inning, Shay put on a glove and played in the right field. Even though no hits came his way, he was obviously filled with joy just to be in the game and on the field, grinning from ear to ear. His father waved to him from the stands.

In the bottom of the ninth inning, Shay's team scored again. Now, with two outs and the bases loaded, the potential winning run on base, it was Shay's turn to bat. Decision time -- do they let Shay bat and give away their chance to win the game?

Shay was given the bat. Everyone knew that a hit was all but impossible because Shay didn't even know how to hold the bat let alone connect with the ball.

Shay struggled to the plate. The pitcher realized that the other team was putting winning aside for this moment in Shay's life, so the pitcher moved in a few steps to lob the ball in softly so Shay could at least make contact. First pitch, Shay swung clumsily and missed. The pitcher took a few more steps forward to toss the ball in softly once again. Shay swung and hit a slow grounder right back to the pitcher.

The game would now be over... except... The pitcher picked up the soft grounder and could have easily thrown the ball to the first baseman. Shay would have been out and that would have been the end of the game. Instead, the pitcher threw the ball over the first baseman's head, intentionally. Everyone in the stands and both teams started yelling, "Shay, run to first! Run to first!"

Never in his life had Shay ever run that far, but he made it to first base, wide-eyed and startled. Everyone yelled, "Run to second, run to second!" Catching his breath, Shay awkwardly ran towards second, gleaming and struggling to get there.

By the time Shay got to second base, the right fielder had the ball, the smallest guy on their team who now had the chance to be the hero for his team. He could have thrown the ball to the second-baseman for the tag, but he understood the pitcher's intentions so he, too, intentionally threw the ball over the third-baseman's head.

Shay ran to second as the runners ahead of him circled the bases toward home. All were screaming, "Shay, Shay, Shay, all the way, all the way!" The shortstop ran to help Shay by turning him in the direction of third base, and shouted, "Run to third! Shay, run to third!"

As Shay rounded third base, the boys from both teams, and the spectators, were on their feet screaming, "Shay, run home! Run home!" Shay ran to home, stepped on the plate, and was cheered as the hero who hit the grand slam and won the game for his team.

The father would tell this story over and over again with tears rolling down his face of how the boys from both teams helped bring a piece of true love and humanity into this world for his child. Shay didn't make it another summer. He died that winter, having never forgotten the day he was the hero in the game, and the look on his mother's face when he told her how he had helped win the game!

"Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand." That's the good news, according to Jesus. And that's the good news we share in our words and our actions to everyone around us. All are welcomed and invited to live into this new Kingdom reality right here and right now.

Now that, is really good news. Amen.