

Epiphany 3
January 21, 2018
Christ the King
Kenner

Repent and Believe the Good News

Mark 1:15

Our monthly gathering of Lutheran clergy met in LaPlace last Tuesday. The conversation turned to grief and one of the pastors said she had read an article recently listing statements which shouldn't be said to anyone suffering the loss of a loved one, because they're both hurtful and usually untrue.

That's when someone else mentioned a book titled "Ten Lies About God."

I relayed an experience I had with one of the Vietnamese "boat people" resettled by my congregation in the late 70's. When I began to console him upon news that his sister had drowned trying to escape Viet Nam, he told me, No, we needn't be sad, because according to his Buddhist belief, she must have done something to deserve it.

It's amazing the things people believe about God. Many of which make God sound quite nasty. And, unfortunately, many pious people can be just as nasty in their defense of the God they've come to believe in.

Certainly the Pharisees and Sadducees were like that when Jesus came upon the human scene. Bossing people around, telling them how they should behave if they wanted the inside track to God's favor. We know the Pharisees had actually come up with a couple of hundred rules for the truly religious to follow.

Unfortunately, some of those types are still around and they give the Christian church a bad reputation. In fact, they turn off folks who might have

become Christians if it weren't for all the bad news being spouted., that is, all the fake news and lies about God.

Which is what Jesus came to dispel. How would people ever be able to know the truth about God? I love the way the letter to the Hebrews says it so directly in one of the readings for Christmas Day: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2).

That's one of the reasons Jesus came among us, to clear the air, straighten out any confusion, and show us in person who God is and what he is like.

And in today's Gospel we have Jesus' first recorded words. Mark tells us, "Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news'" (Mark 1:14-15).

In other words, stop believing all that bad news, all of those pious sounding superstitions and lies you may have been believing, "repent," i.e. turn away from that, and "believe in the good news of God."

"The good news of God." How strange that expression must have sounded to those who only associated God with bad news. Folks who thought of God mostly in negative threatening and even terrifying terms. What could the good news of God possibly be?

Jesus uses the word "repent," because this change in how we perceive God produces a head-spinning conversion, a 170 degree turn-about.

Jesus is come that we might hear and see and experience and enjoy the good news of God. That normally means that we stop believing what we've been believing, sometimes what we were even taught to believe, what seemed logical to believe, what we thought was the truth. That we do a complete turn around and believe in the good news instead.

And that means asking ourselves, "what might I have been believing instead of the good news from God? What might I be trusting in, hoping in, placing my faith in, apart from the Good News which Jesus brings?"

Because everything we may have been believing which isn't the good news, anything we've trusted in other than the Gospel, is actually bad news when we look at it carefully, because it requires more from us spiritually than we're capable of, like asking the blind to see or the deaf to hear.

So, finally and most importantly, what is the good news of God?

The good news is that God is not some impersonal cosmic force, but our creator;

The good news is that we are created by him for a purpose: to love him and enjoy him forever;

The good news is that God doesn't want to be a mystery to us or want us to be in the dark about him, but has revealed himself in many ways throughout time, but finally and fully in Jesus the Christ;

The good news is that despite our sin, he loves us more than we can possibly imagine;

The good news is that he knows us through and through, better than we know ourselves, watches over us and responds to us and our prayers;

The good news is that he will never leave us nor forsake us;

The good news is that he has compassion for us and leads us like a good shepherd;

The good news is that despite the inevitability of death, we shall be raised to life with him forever;

The good news is that if we continue in his word we will know the truth and the truth will make us free;

The good news is that, as Isaiah tells us (Isaiah 61:1-3), Jesus has been sent to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion -- to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit" (Isaiah 61:1-3).

the good news is that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in him may not perish, but have everlasting life.

For the good news of God we need only look to and listen to Jesus.