



February 7, 2021

Isaiah 40: 21, 26-31

Mark 1: 29-39

The Gospel According To...
The Reverend Evans McGowan

As some of you know, I have had many book ideas over the years. From a screenplay of the Apostle Paul, to a memoir of my grandfather, to a book on the theology of *Lost*, the best television series ever made... I've had many book ideas.

But if I were ever to write a memoir of my own life, I already have a title: *In Search of Gospel*; that is, in search of good news. As I went to church as a PK – that's preacher's kid to those who don't know – I wondered, what is the good news here amidst all these older people and hard pews?

As I went off to college in North Carolina to Davidson College, the only Presbyterian school I visited at the request of my mother, I asked – what is the good news here amidst all this academic rigor?

As I went to Kenya as a PC(USA) Young Adult Volunteer, I searched for the good news amidst devastating poverty and extreme needs.

As I went to grad school in California at SFTS and later here to Michigan to be a resident minister, I explored the good news as I began my ministry as a pastor.

As I went to Kauai to teach middle schoolers math and social studies, I sought to model the good news to my students.

And now back in Michigan working with college students and this congregation, I am always searching for good news, for gospel, wherever it might be found.

And what is the good news?

Some people might say it's happiness. Others would say it's riches. We are all searching for good news.

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Just tell me when I can get my vaccine. Tell me when we can go to the movies again. Tell me when we can hug each other again. Tell me... some good news.

The religious word we use for good news is gospel – coming from God spiel in old English. It comes from the Greek *euangelion* (*eu = good; Angeli = angel/messenger; ion = diminutive*) so it's about the message but also the messenger. So where does good news come from? Good news comes from a messenger. In ancient times, a ruler, like Caesar, would issue good news via fiat or proclamation – like when there was a major victory in battle, or over a political opponent... or simply to announce it was his birthday! That's good news, right?

But this good news coming from the emperor isn't necessarily god's news... to be god's news, it needs to be good news for EVERYONE.

But is good news for EVERYONE even possible? In a day and age when any bit of news can be twisted or used against one party or another, or declared real or fake... when information is power and manipulation the manner to move ahead in the marketplace... when one person's truth is another's conspiracy... how can any news be good news for ALL?

The question quickly becomes, the Gospel According to... *who?*

One thing is certain: we aren't going to believe the good news if we don't believe in the person speaking it. Isn't that true? That we believe something to be true based on the source. This is what I taught my students – check your sources. You might believe me because I am your teacher or your pastor, but you also must trust me if you are going to listen to what I have to say. As such, truth is based in trust. When we no longer trust the news media, then we no longer believe anything they will say. When we no longer trust the other side, we will not believe what they say. If we are to ever have truth again, if we are ever to believe in something together, we must learn to trust one another again. Good news depends on who is saying it.

And what is the gospel you might ask? The Gospel is the Good News of Jesus Christ, the one who came into this world, who fully sacrificed himself for all, so that all might live lives full of grace and truth and love of one another. That's why we ask you when you become a member or serve in some way in this community: Do you trust in Jesus Christ? Do you trust this messenger of the good news?

Okay... but what does that *mean*? From Kenya to Kauai, from the Carolinas to California, this is the question I asked. What is the good news Jesus is saying? How can I feel it? How can I experience it? And by that I mean what does it mean to me? How is the story of Jesus good news for me? ...searching for assurance.

In particular, it has roots in Isaiah where people would be brought back from exile. The Kingdom of God is near. Peace is here. It's a homecoming. Welcome home. Welcome to your truest, most beloved self. Where you don't have to be anyone else except yourself, as God created you to be.

For something to be Gospel, it has to be good news to everyone. Therefore, a better question is: What does the gospel mean for us? And an even better question: What does the gospel mean for everyone?

How would you define the gospel? What is the good news that you yearn for in your life? Is it unity in our political strife, both within our families and in our legislatures? Perhaps you're awaiting good news from a diagnosis, either for you or a friend or family member. Perhaps you are overwhelmed by life and looking for a way out. Perhaps you need help but are too afraid to ask. In all these situations and more, we are seeking the good news. That someone somewhere will come to our rescue and deliver us the good news: We are saved... saved from financial ruin. Saved from depression. Saved from violence and destruction. Saved from death. What is the Good News? I believe this question is not only one that has permeated my life, but one that permeates in the Bible, too.

In Isaiah, we find a Hebrew people in Babylon, strangers in a strange land, exiled from their home and longing for some sure foundation, some hope of good news. Therefore, it is good news that God created the Heavens and Earth – it means there is intention in the design, that what has happened is not haphazard nor our existence an accident. God has the power to save us:

*29 The Lord 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.*

It is good news that God does not grow weary... and gives power to the faint and strength to the powerless...

And in Mark, there is a person with the power to save: Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ IS the good news. A gift to be received. An invitation to new life. An opportunity to fellowship with the divine... not just for the gods and the good. Jesus isn't all talk – he walks the walk and does so with power and authority. And the church is not the kingdom of god. Things are happening outside the synagogue, too! This kingdom of God is everywhere... and therefore Jesus must go everywhere... and where he did not go, his disciples now go... It's as if Jesus is

saying, “It may have started with me, but this truth was here long before I was... and will remain long after I am gone.” Certainly there were people in Jesus’ day who needed good news... who needed to be saved from their illness.

Review the passage...

This is the one who Casts out demons... heals the sick... gets rid of evil... welcomes in good... who unburdens us from mental and physical illness... who restores us to full health. Not for our own sake or his sake, but for the sake of the gospel – for the sake of sharing this good news for everyone, everywhere.

And what is this message? The Kingdom of God is near... Love is all around us... and it is within us.

We come to this table today as people sick with sin... and souls searching for spirit. The good news is that the Kingdom of God is near. Love is all around. To use the words of the musician and singer-songwriter Dave Matthews, Christ says:

*Eat this bread, think of it as me
Drink this wine and dream it will be.*

Today we eat and we dream. Today we wake the dreams into reality by receiving the message of love and then becoming messengers of love.

Christ has come, and Christ will come again. Love has come, and love will come again. This is how the good news comes to us – in a carpenter from Nazareth. That by his example we would be empowered by his spirit to spread the good news long after we have left this table... long after he has left our town... and long after he is dead.

As we celebrate Black History Month, we are reminded that the Civil Rights Movement uplifted not just people of color but all people – so everyone would be treated with dignity and respect. MLK had a dream. His dream lives on long after his death. We who follow in his footsteps are waking those dreams into reality when we enact policies and treat one another with kindness and decency... when we stand up for justice AND mercy, truth AND reconciliation.

As we come to this table, as we come to Christ for healing, as we are about to sing, know that the good news we seek is not only for each of us, but for ALL of us.

May you find this good news, wherever you are, and may you share it in word and in deed, wherever you go.