

Easter Sunday, April 17, 2022
Good News
1 Corinthians 15:1-11

There's a lot of things we can get sidetracked by as individuals, and as a church. In 1 Corinthians, Paul has highlighted many of these – divisions and discord, debates about theology, preferences in worship. Today, on Easter Sunday, Paul reminds us of the heart of our faith, the basis of our hope, the foundation of our love ... Jesus. Jesus is the centre ...

"Let me now remind you, dear brothers and sisters, of the Good News I preached to you ... It is this Good News that saves you ..."

*"I passed on to you what was **most important** and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him" (15:1-8).*

The "Gospel" Truth

Your translation may say, *"Let me remind you of 'the good news/gospel' I preached to you ... it is this 'good news/gospel' that saves you."* Time for a bit of a language lesson (sorry!). The Greek word is "euangelion" – "eu-" means "good" and "angelion" means "message/news" (an "angel" (same Greek word) is literally a "messenger"). In Old English translations, it was translated "god-" (meaning "good") and "spel" (meaning "news") or "gospel." So the Greek word and the Old English word "gospel" both literally mean "good news" in modern English.

When the angel/messenger appeared to the shepherds, he said, *"Do not be afraid, I bring you euangelion/gospel/good news of great joy for all people. The Saviour – yes, the Messiah, the Lord – has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David"* (Luke 2:10-11).

When Jesus began to teach, He announced, *"The time promised by God has come at last. The Kingdom of God is near. Repent of your sins and believe the euangelion/gospel/Good News"* (Mark 1:15).

Now Paul is saying, *"Let me now remind you, dear brothers and sisters, of the euangelion/gospel/Good News I preached to you ..."* What is the good news? Paul defines it very precisely: *"What is most important and what has also been passed on to me: Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said"* (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

The Gospel is good news about the birth, life, death, AND resurrection of Christ. He was born. He taught us truth. He died. He was buried. He was raised from the dead to life. He

was seen by hundreds, most still alive when Paul wrote these words (1 Corinthians 15:5-8).

"It is this Good News that saves you" (1 Corinthians 15:2). This truth about Jesus, His death, and resurrection is the good news. Everyone who believes in Jesus is saved.

Sometimes we're told that to be a Christian means

- we must be baptized. The Bible doesn't say that.
- we must receive a second baptism of the Holy Spirit or display certain behaviours (like speaking in tongues). The Bible doesn't say that.
- we must do certain things, give up certain bad habits, or attain a certain standard of holiness before we're a Christian. The Bible doesn't say that.

Paul simply says the good news – the gospel – is believing Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead. That's what saves us. That makes us Christians. Period. Nothing else. Nothing religious we do is the means of our salvation. We are not saved because we are good enough or do religious things. We are saved because God has acted, in Jesus, to accomplish salvation for us, then simply calls on us to trust Him. Our faith is the response we make, in faith and life, to the saving acts of God. Salvation is God's work, not ours.

The issue is this: *"Everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard"* (Romans 3:23). That's true, isn't it? We have a problem. Most of us sense that there is a huge gulf between ourselves and God. We need God. We know that. We also know we're not good enough to relate to our perfect, holy God. So the issue is this: How can I get to know God? How can my sins be forgiven?

Paul writes, *"God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners ... For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 5:8, 6:23).

The good news – the gospel - is this: God loves us. He came among us, Himself, as Jesus. He died for us and rose again from the dead. Through His love, life, death, and resurrection, He has provided the gift of forgiveness, hope, and new life. If we believe in Jesus, we are saved. We are God's family (John 1:12). We are secure in God's hands.

"For this is how God loved the world," says Jesus, "He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

What does it mean "to believe"?

The Devil believes Jesus is the Messiah, that He died, and that He rose from the dead, but the Devil isn't a Christian, is he? What does it mean to "believe in Him"?

Consider two people deep in the jungle. The jungle abruptly ends and a huge canyon lies before them. Sheer cliffs plummet to an angry river, sharp rocks, and crocodiles. Across the

chasm swings a fragile-looking rope bridge. An engineer on the expedition looks skeptically at the structure. She gets out her iPad and makes calculations. *"The good news is I know it'll hold us,"* she says. *"Will you cross it?"* her companion asks. *"After you,"* she replies.

Is there a difference between "believing" something intellectually and really "believing" it, meaning you are willing to act on your belief? You bet. Just ask these two adventurers.

Many people **know** a lot about Christianity and Jesus, but they don't really **believe** it. They don't trust Jesus. Their knowledge doesn't affect their lives. Other people really do believe in Jesus. Believing in Him, they step out in faith. They live His ways. There is a world of difference between simply **knowing** about Jesus and actually **believing** in Jesus.

Another little language lesson. The word "Christian" was not a word Jesus' people used to describe themselves. People who really believed in Jesus did not choose the word "Christian" – the Romans did that (Acts 11:26). The Romans recognized these people who follow Jesus lived differently than anyone else, including the Jews of the time. "Christian" is a good word. It emphasizes Jesus as the essential centre of our faith. But is a "static" word. It describes our key relationship and primary loyalty, but it doesn't say much about how we live as His people. The assumption could be that if you once "make a decision for Jesus" you are now a "Christian," and that's it. Done. Complete. Just go on with your old, normal life, with the assurance that, when you die, you will go to heaven.

The early believers in Jesus described themselves as "followers of Jesus" or "followers of the Way" (Acts 9:1-2, 22:4-5). This is a much more "dynamic" phrase. Yes, you are a "Christ-person," but you also try to live "in Christ" every moment of every day. Being a "follower" of Jesus means no more of the old normal. Now you are living as the Holy Spirit would have you live. You live "in the Spirit." Following Jesus changes everything.

Believing the good news means trusting Jesus really can deal with my past. It means choosing to accept His gift of forgiveness. Jesus really can help me put the past behind. More than just intellectually believing "Christ died for my sins", it means allowing the Holy Spirit to know I'm forgiven, leave the past behind, and start again (1 John 1:9).

Believing the good news means I really follow Jesus. I choose to live with Jesus and live for Jesus. The Bible uses the word "repent" (Mark 1:14-15). Repenting doesn't simply mean feeling sorry for what I've done. It means being sorry enough that I change the way I live ... right now. Jesus always welcomed people, no matter how many issues they had. But He also challenged them, "*Go, and sin no more*" (John 8:11).

For instance, if I want to drive to Calgary and I notice signs for Milk River going past ... simply gritting my teeth and saying to myself, "I don't care what the signs say, I'm going my way ..." won't work. I need to stop, turn around, and go a different direction.

When we believe in Jesus, we choose to stop, turn around, and go a different direction. Our faith changes the way we live, the way we relate, how we make decisions, how we spend our

time and money, and what our plans look like. We to step out onto the bridge, believing Jesus' way is the right way. As we live a life increasingly shaped by Jesus, it changes our lives, words, and actions.

People who really believe in something don't hide the fact. Those who believe in the Edmonton Elks wear their green and gold proudly, even in Calgary. Our veterans and members of our armed forces and wear their uniforms proudly. Those who believe in Jesus live lives that model, as well as possible, the values, priorities, and teachings of Jesus. We live out our faith in Jesus. When appropriate, we talk about our faith in Jesus. We really believe in Jesus. People can tell by how we live, talk, and relate.

The Bible calls this "bearing fruit." Somewhere, sometime, somehow, people will see evidence we believe in Jesus. *"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control"* (Galatians 5:22-23). Peter says: *"Add to your faith moral excellence, to moral excellence knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control patient endurance, to patient endurance godliness, to godliness brotherly affection, and to brotherly affection love for everyone"* (2 Peter 1:5-7).

Yes, we do "believe" the good news that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and was raised from the dead on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:2-4). But that belief changes how we live. We keep on living our beliefs by loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength; and by loving our neighbours as ourselves.

Every Good Friday/Easter, as I reflect on the death and resurrection of Jesus, I am inspired to worship. I am more and more in awe of the wonder of God's love. I am more and more aware of how little I deserve His grace. As Paul says, *"I don't deserve to be called His follower ... But by the grace of God I am what I am"* (15:9-10). His grace that transforms my life. I do not deserve it. I did not earn it. God simply gives me – and all of us – life.

Every Good Friday/Easter is also a time for recommitment. I remind myself that I am called to stop. To turn around. And to live God's Word and His way in my life. I need to love as He loved: *"Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love"* (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Love is not an emotion. Love is an action. *"Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance"* (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). This is the love God shows us through Jesus. Now we are to show the same love to one another ...

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