

“News”

Do you watch the news on TV? Read the newspaper (fewer people read newspapers these days)? Catch the news online? We pretty much know what we’re going to get, right? Coronavirus updates on the number of cases and deaths. Racial unrest, demonstrations, protests. Politicians trashing each other. Have you ever said, “I’ve had enough!” and just shut off the TV or changed channels? Or maybe just looked at the headlines in the newspaper and decided not to read the whole article? Gee, may someday we’ll get back to what’s normally in the news: accidents, fires, crime! Maybe you’ve seen that piece going around on Facebook: Get rid of the news and 80% of the world’s problems will go away. *So...much...bad...news!*

This is July 4th weekend. Yesterday was Independence Day. Normally this is a happy time. Fireworks, parades, cookouts, patriotic concerts. Not so much this year. Covid-19 has put a damper on that. And besides, what’s to celebrate? Our country’s in such a mess, with so much turmoil and animosity. Happy Birthday, America! *So...much...bad...news!*

But I’m a preacher of the gospel, and the word gospel means “good news”! So ask me, “Harry, do you have any good news to share today?” Well, I’m glad you asked, because I do!

First of all, I don’t believe our country is as bad as it’s made out to be by most of the news media. This is a difficult time for our country – not just the coronavirus, but the racial unrest. We’ve been reminded once again of the racial injustice in our history, and that we have a ways to go in order to correct this evil. In the past, we’ve probably looked at our origin and history through rose-colored glasses, ignoring our serious flaws. But I think the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction, and there’s a tendency to focus almost entirely on what’s wrong with America’s past and present. Neither ignoring our faults, nor obsessing over our faults, presents an accurate picture of who we are as a nation.

Now I do believe this is an important moment in our history, and we have to seize the momentum, and take steps to make our country more fair and just to all our citizens. But why can’t we, for example, at the same time highlight the millions of decent Americans who truly want this nation to be a place where everyone is treated with respect and given equal opportunities?

So, in spite of what we see and hear in the news, I think there’s much to celebrate about America! Happy Birthday, USA!

I said earlier in this message that I’m a preacher of the gospel, a bearer of “good news”. *Christianity is a message of good news!* The Bible is our Book, and it’s filled with good news! So much wisdom. So many promises of God. Words of life and hope. I’d like to relate just a few of these tidbits of good news, that hopefully speak to the time in which we are living.

First of all, God loves you! How’s that for a starter! That the God of all creation, the God who made you, and me, and everything that there is, loves *you*. The Bible says, “God is love” (1 John 4:16). Jesus was God in human form, and Jesus loved and welcomed everyone into the inner circle of God’s family.

I am currently reading a remarkable book called *Tattoos On the Heart*, by Father Greg Boyle, Roman Catholic priest. For about 30 years he has served a parish in Los Angeles that is located in one of the toughest gang areas in the country. He heads up a gang intervention program called Homeboy Industries, and he embodies in his life the unconditional love of God for these tough gang members starving for love. This inspiring book recounts one moving story after another of how even tough gang members can be transformed when they experience that they are loved by someone, and by God.

You've been created in God's image. You are valued, and of infinite worth. Don't ever forget it!

Here's some more good news to piggyback on that. ***We have a Savior who can help us overcome the ugly things that cause so much of the bad news we hear!*** Do you remember the Christmas story - how an angel speaks to shepherds tending their flocks that night 2,000 years ago: "Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you *good news* of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord'" (Luke 2:9-10). The angel says, "I am bringing you *good news* that a Savior is born." This Savior's name is Jesus.

Here's a question for you: What's at the core of all the things that make for the bad news of the day? Bad cops killing black men and women. Looting and burning of other's people's property. Nasty politicians on both sides of the aisle. What's at the root of this? *It's the evil in the human heart and spirit.* You say, C'mon, Harry. That's such a simplistic answer to a complicated situation. Really. Listen to the words of Jesus: "It is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come – sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly. All these evils come from inside..." (Mark 7:21-23).

Jesus came to cleanse and change the human heart and spirit, to take away the hate and the prejudice and the selfishness, and fill it with love and goodness. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!" Someone has quipped: "How can you have a brave new world with the same old people?" Christ has the power to take away the ugly stuff in our hearts – the things that separate us from God and alienate us from each other – and fill our hearts with love and goodness, if we are willing to surrender our lives to Him and His control. Sounds like good news, to me!

Here's some more good news. ***When it gets dark, the light of God shines brighter.*** We have a God who is famous for bringing good out of the worst of situations. The supreme example of this is the cross. We humans crucified God's Son. How much worse can you get than that! But God took the worst that humans could do, and turned it around. Jesus' death opened the door to provide salvation for the world, for all who trust Him.

I watched some video taken at the site where George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis, the site of so much pain and sorrow and wrong. A large crowd had gathered, white people and African-Americans. They were worshipping, singing, as a band played Christian music. There were

preachers – white and black men and women. And a revival took place! People were arm in arm praying. People gave their lives to Christ and were saved and baptized. God was bringing good news out of horrible news! (By the way, you probably never saw that video footage on any of the major networks).

The good news is that wherever things are darkest the light of God shines brightest. Difficult times – times like we’re living through – bring out the worst in people. But they also bring out the best. Don’t get so caught up in the gloomy news of the day to miss where God is at work!

One more example of good news that we don’t want to miss: ***The future is not in the hands of the Republicans, or the Democrats!*** No matter who wins the November election, the future isn’t in the hands of Donald Trump or Joe Biden. Or the Republican Party, or the Democratic Party. Or for that matter, the future is not in the hands of Vladimir Putin, or the leader of China, Xi Jinping, or Kim Jong Un, Supreme Leader of North Korea. *The future is in the hands of God.*

Jesus talked about the *kingdom of God*, God’s rule on earth. Jesus began His ministry saying the kingdom of God was breaking into this corrupt and fallen world. Listen to this: “Jesus went through Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the *good news* of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people” (Matthew 4:23). Did you notice, Jesus is going around proclaiming the *good news of the kingdom*.

When we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we pray, “Thy kingdom come...”. It’s not here yet, completely. But it will come, and God will rule over all His creation. No matter how bad things are, no matter how bleak the future of our nation or the world looks, when the final votes are in and the curtain closes on the last act of human history, God will have the last word. He is moving human history to a meaningful and purposeful ending. As the Hallelujah Chorus has it, “The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ...and he shall reign forever and ever.”

So, when you get disgusted with all the shenanigans of politicians and world leaders, try to see the bigger picture, and remember, they’re only on the scene for a little while, but “he shall reign forever and ever” when His kingdom finally comes. I hope you that’s some good news that’s a tonic for your soul!

So, yeah, keep up with the news. Stay informed. But don’t let CNN or NBC or Fox News or MSNBC totally dominate how you understand what’s happening. Because it’s biased (a topic for another time), and often it’s far too negative, and most of the time only looks at events taking place from the human perspective, not necessarily how God sees them. But it’s not a bad idea to spend less time with the news, and more time with the Book – because the Bible is a treasure chest of Good News from God!

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