

The Stewardship of Good News

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Isaiah 61:1-4

Advent III – in Conjunction with the Christmas portion of Handel’s *Messiah*

“Good news.” The word, “evangelical,” has taken a kind of hit this week. I mean not to discuss election results this morning. And I mean not to try to rehabilitate a word and its use.

That word, “evangelical,” is both a problem and a gift. It is a problem in that it has come to mean, in American religious practice, a particular understanding of the Bible, and theology, and morality, and ethics, that can be restrictive and feel off-putting. In the last generation and in more accelerated fashion recently, it has come to associate a particular stripe of political belief with this religious understanding. We now see what that looks like, where being Christian, even, means that you must believe this about that, and if you don’t, then your very faith is in question.

On another hand, the word “evangelical” can be a problem for people like us Presbyterians who are not so sure how we feel about sharing our faith, speaking in personal terms, engaging the Bible at deeper levels.

At best, that term “evangelical,” should never serve as a divisive label, as it does, theologically or politically. At best, being “evangelical” should be an invitation to us all. To engage the story of Jesus deeply, both personally and collectively. To read the Bible regularly and take it seriously. To share our story, appropriately, not coercively, but hospitably and passionately. To allow our beliefs to lead us to ethical and moral places, even as we leave room for political difference.

That’s the vision. “Evangelical,” “evangelism,” means, simply, “good news, or “good word.” In that sense, we are all, or we all should aspire to be, “evangelists,” carriers and sharers of good news. No stereotypes needed.

What does that look like? Isaiah tells us:

Good news to the oppressed– a commitment to erase and eradicate whatever is oppressing people, economically, politically, socially and culturally,

Bind up the broken hearted and comfort all who mourn – a commitment to be with those who have experienced loss, whether the several recent deaths in this congregation or the ones in your lives, recent or distant, their impact made deeper in this season.

To repair the ruined cities – perhaps that is the best news to which we can be committed. To look around and see where things are broken, in systems, between groups of people, to understand that God’s vision is for us to be healed and whole, as a people, as a community, and to work toward that promise.

We are about to hear a musical masterwork. Embedded in it is a vision of good news. As the music takes hold of you, allow the deeper vision to do so as well. Hear in it your calling to be an evangelist, to receive, and nurture, and cultivate, and then share, the good tidings, the good word. Unto us a child is born. This is news that will change your life and transform the world. Amen.