



March 15, 2020
Pastor Larry Hackman

20/20 Vision: Good News

Luke 4:43, 16-21; Luke 7:20-23

Thank you Pastor Mark, and hello to everybody joining us online! I'm joined here by a smattering of some of our elders, deacons, life group leaders and others who have agreed to be present here to help me preach and participate in worship. We will be having a conversation after the service tonight about what Mark just talked about, a vision to be 100 churches in 100 homes. After we have filmed our service we will talk practically about what it looks like for them to lead these 100 churches in their own homes in the coming week. This may be the last chance we have to gather folks like this, even in this limited capacity, for a while.

As Mark said, this is our chance. We have talked about loving our neighbors, being for our city. Here is the moment when that kind of thinking will be needed more than ever. And while that may begin with many of the folks in this room, I know there are many more who are listening and watching this who will take up the call to give of ourselves as Jesus did, for the sake of elevating others.

As we have been planning this church plant in Port Orchard, I had a number of people who would approach me and ask if we had a building yet. And I would say, invariably, the church is not a building, it's a people. I want to remind you of that in this season. The church, this church, is not composed of this building. It's not even composed of this worship service. It's you. Exalting Jesus. Elevating others. Launching disciple-makers happens as much outside of a building as inside. We're about to see how true that is.

If you were paying attention, you just heard me say our brand-new mission statement there. This week, we were going to continue to talk about the strategy of our church, but obviously, the strategy of our church is going to need to change now. It just didn't make sense to keep talking about that when what is on people's hearts and minds is the current crisis we are in. So I want to talk about that. I want to talk about good news.

There's a lot of bad news out there right now. Lots of it. So people are hungry for good news. I recently came across a section on MSNBC's website that's dedicated to "good news." There's stories about people raising money to pay for other people's surgeries or doing acts of kindness. There's stories about cute animals doing cute things. It's all very heartfelt, but honestly, it feels like these kinds of stories don't stand a chance against all the bad news. We need good news that can rise above the deluge of bad news we hear day in and day out.

Christians have “Good news.” We call it the “gospel.” Actually, that’s what “Gospel” means: good news. But what I’ve found interesting is that when I typically ask someone what the good news is in our congregation I get one of two responses usually. One is that people will just have a hard time deciding exactly how to say it. Most of us would probably struggle to articulate what “good news” means to us. It’s kind of murky.

The other response is to think it’s an evangelism formula. Something like, Jesus died and saved me from my sin. That’s not wrong, but I have two problems with that. The first is that isn’t how good news works. If Jimmy tells me that he’s worried about the virus, and the economic implications, and how is he going to take care of his kids, and my response to him is, “Don’t worry, I have good news for you. Jesus died for your sins!” Jimmy is going to have a hard time connecting the dots. What does my sin have to do with the coronavirus? And maybe you can make that jump for Jimmy, but that makes my point: that’s not how good news works. Good news spreads on its own. It’s infectious. “Jesus saved me from my sin,” is a theological proposition. It’s a statement of fact. It’s like Jimmy was asking for a hug and someone gives him a math equation. What Jimmy is dealing with is worry, right? Worry, is a matter of the heart.

So when we talk about good news, it has to be a matter of the heart. For lots of historical and sociological reasons, we have been taught to believe that we are primarily thinking creatures. But we’re not. You only have to consider this for a moment, to realize that most of what you do in a day is without conscious consideration. Have you ever heard about something someone did and thought, why did they do that? because it was so irrational? Or have you ever thought that about yourself? Do you ever wonder why you often can’t break habits, even though you know, intellectually, that what you’re doing may be unhealthy? If your mind isn’t in the captain’s seat, then what is?

Our heart. We are primarily loving creatures. And we are compelled by our hearts. St. Augustine is said to have remarked that **if you want to find out who someone is, don’t ask them what they believe, ask them what they love.** So, the gospel, good news, is not some spiritual proposition, some statement of fact. It’s got to be something that captures the heart.

And this brings us to the second reason why Christians miss the mark when we try and articulate the gospel: we don’t talk about good news like Jesus did.

You have to realize this, when we say something like “Jesus died and saved us from our sins,” we are saying that from the perspective of 2,000 years after the fact. But Jesus preached the gospel, good news, before he died. And we know he didn’t go around saying, “Good news, I will die for your sins!” That’s not actually what he said to people! So what did he say?

Well, in Luke 4:43 he says this, **“I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.”** His good news was about the kingdom of God. We don’t really talk about the Kingdom of God much in sermons, but the reality was that

this is what Jesus' whole message was about. You hear it all over the place, especially in the gospel of Matthew, but any gospel you look into you'll see him talking about it.

Now I've found that as much as people I've talked to have struggled to tell me what "gospel" means, they've REALLY struggled to tell me what the "Kingdom of God" is. But I'll make it dead simple for you. **The Kingdom of God is wherever God's way is done.**

So in other words, Jesus' good news was that another king had come. In fact, the world "gospel" back then had incredibly political undertones. A "gospel" message was usually what was told when a conquering force took over a region. So, let's use the Roman Empire as an example of how this word "gospel" was used. When the Roman's would take over any particular area, they would send out runners who would go from town to town and make these proclamations. They would say, "Good news! Rome has taken over your country. Now, this is what the rule of Rome will look like. This is what your new king, Caesar, will rule like." That was how they used the word gospel then. So when Jesus says that he has a "gospel" of the kingdom of God, he is talking about a competing rule. In other words, "Good news, there's a new king in town! And this is what his rule will look like." No wonder he made the authorities in Jerusalem sweat. He was preaching an insurrection!

So what did Jesus say it looked like when God's will was done? When Jesus ruled?

Turn with me to Luke 4:16. **And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,**

**"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."**

And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

What does the kingdom of God look like? When King Jesus runs the show, human suffering is alleviated. There is peace, justice, healing, forgiveness, compassion, reconciliation, and love.¹

¹ Viola, Frank. *Insurgence* (p. 125). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

What is the good news of the Kingdom of God? That King Jesus rules, and his rule is trustworthy and good. When we read about Jesus in the Gospels, we read about his reign. We see a king whose humility was profound, who did not hesitate to wash the filth and grime off of his disciple's feet. The life of King Jesus is a life that was relentless in pursuing the people on the edge of society; no one was too ugly, too much of a pariah, too broken to be loved by him. We see a king whose wisdom is otherworldly, who told us that the best way to live life was to love your enemy, to turn the other cheek, to live life radically upside down from the aim to make me #1, and his wisdom has never failed. We see a king who rode on a donkey for his coronation ceremony, whose crown was thorns, and whose throne was a cross. That's a king I could love. That's a king I could serve.

Later in the Gospel of Luke in chapter 7, John the Baptist sends some of his followers to Jesus and has them ask him a question:

John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?'" In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

In other words: **trust me.**

We commonly use words like "faith" and "believe" when we talk about the gospel, but I think we do those words a disservice. They do not mean what we think they mean. Often when we say "faith" we mean blind, almost thoughtless consent to something we can't see or understand. "Belief" we take to mean almost the opposite: an intellectual assent to something. But the root Greek word for "faith" and "belief" in Scripture is the same: **pistis**. And the real thrust of that word is not blind consent, nor intellectual assent, it's trust.

Trust is a heart word. Trust me, Jesus says to John. You see that my mission is to bring healing, to free the captive, to forgive, to reconcile. Will you trust in my rule? My reign?

The good news of the Kingdom is the good news of a King. And the question the king poses to us is, what captures your heart? Who, or what, do you trust?

We are a very religious country, here in America, but not in the way you think. We actually have a number of things that our hearts trust in, whether we are atheist or we go to church. That is religion, because religion is centered around worship. Martin Luther said, **"Trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and idol... Whatever then [your] heart clings to... and relies upon, that is properly [your] God."**

And our hearts cling and rely upon a lot of different things. In fact, there are seven things Americans religiously trust in. These things each come with their own doctrine, ethics, experiences, rituals, and so on. And I didn't come up with this on my own, it's from the research done by a group of sociologists who wrote a book called *The Altars Where We Worship*. They are: **Body and sex, big business, entertainment, politics, sports, and science and technology**. Whether you go to church or not, there's a chance that your heart is captured by one or more of these things.

Each of these things offer their own version of good news. But what has been fascinating for me to see is how each of them is being threatened by the coronavirus.

The good news of body and sex is that we can find pleasure however we want. But a tiny virus we can't even see with the naked eye is now putting our pleasure, and our bodies, in mortal peril. The good news of big business is that we can be prosperous, but this tiny virus is toppling our markets, shutting down jobs. The good news of entertainment is that we can escape and be happy, but fear and depression are running rampant. The good news of politics is that if the right person is in power things will be better, but our leaders are failing us left and right. The good news of sports is that anybody can accomplish great feats, but our stadiums are empty and our events are being canceled. The good news of science and technology is that anything can be understood and that any problem can be fixed, but this tiny virus is causing us to face the limits of our knowledge and technology.

What do you trust in? Who do you trust in? What does your heart cling to?

I overheard a friend of mine in the office the other day talking to someone, saying that she wasn't worried about the coronavirus. I had to wonder, why not? This friend of mine, let's call her Sarah since she asked to remain anonymous, is in the prime risk category. She's in her 70's, and even though she doesn't have any underlying conditions, she's statistically 40 times more likely to die if she were to get the virus than me. But she wasn't afraid. So I asked her why. Her reply to me was this, "I have seen the hand of the Lord in the land of the living." She went on to tell me that she'd been through a lot of suffering in her life. A husband who'd died. Kids who were estranged. She almost died in a foreign country, cut off from health care. She said it was actually in that moment, when she was near death, that she realized something about Jesus. She said she felt like Jesus was saying, "I placed you here for a reason. You are mine. I put you here." And she realized that whether she lived or died, she trusted King Jesus. And just like 2,000 years ago, she'd seen Jesus comfort her when her husband died. She'd seen Jesus reconcile her to her child. She'd seen healing when she was on the verge of death. So she had learned with her heart to trust Jesus, even now.

And it shows in her life. Because she trusts King Jesus, she lives like him. She told me about how she has a neighbor who lives on their own, who has family far away. She told the neighbor, I will check on you and make sure you are okay. She had another friend who told her that they only had two weeks of food, and Sarah told her, no you don't you have three months. I don't care if I

have to walk across town in the dark to make sure you're fed, I will take care of you. Sarah is a woman whose heart belongs to King Jesus, and it shows.

What is good news in the time of the coronavirus? Are you able to say, like my friend Sarah, that you trust in Jesus and his kingdom, his rule in your life? Or are you trusting in something else? Politics? Science?

Followers of Jesus, we have good news. We have a king who has promised us eternal life now, and forever more. He still reigns, he still proclaims liberty for the captive, sight for the poor, and freedom for the oppressed. I see it all the time. I see it in my own life. I see it in my friend Sarah's life, and many others. Will you trust that he still reigns, even now in the time we are in? If you can wholeheartedly trust in Jesus, it will make all the difference in the world.

There are things you can do to build your trust in King Jesus. The first I'd encourage is to create habits of the heart that build trust. Did you know you have habits of your heart? When you turn on the radio to listen to the news, or flip on the TV, that's a habit of the heart. You are looking for someone, something to trust in. Two simple ones are to read your Bible and to pray. Read the Good News. Literally. Read the Gospel of Luke. Consider, as you read it, who King Jesus is. Learn to love him. Pray to him. When you pray, you align your heart to God's heart. You are indicating where your trust is. There are seasons in the life of the church when we pray more than ever, and if there's ever a time to trust Jesus, to align our hearts to his, it's now.

The second thing I'd encourage is to share. You can start by sharing this video. There are people out there who are afraid, who need hope. They need to hear that King Jesus is reigning, that they can trust him with their heart. 1 Peter 3:15 says, "**in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.**" I would love to hear that Christians are known for not being afraid, but for having hope.

Third, I encourage you to attend a viewing party for when we broadcast sermons next week. This is the one we are most cautious about. I don't want us to be flippant about this virus. The government is recommending that gatherings remain small, and we should take that recommendation seriously. But at the same time, we believe we need to be intentional about creating local networks of Jesus followers, so we can care for each other and for our neighborhoods. We will make the focal point of those gatherings around Sunday mornings and the videos we will be posting. I will not shame anyone for being cautious about contracting this virus, but as much as anyone is able and find it prudent, we want to facilitate community. As these local networks become clearer, we plan on resourcing neighborhoods with ways to care for each other, outside of worship and encouragement.