

“The Good News”

Acts 10: 34-43

Easter Day B, Boise, 2021

When the women — two of them named Mary and another Salome — entered the tomb with their spices, they found there an angel instead of a corpse. Jesus “is not here.” “He is risen.” Now “go tell His disciples and Peter that He is going before you in Galilee,” the place where the Master first announced to them that He would die and rise again. The women took a while to recover from their fright, but, according to St Luke, they acted upon the angel’s instructions, and told the male disciples the Good News.

As you all know, the NT was written in Greek and then translated into other languages. The word used for that message the women at the tomb were charged to deliver, is, *evangelion*. Such is the way that a Greek would pronounce it today, *evangelion*. It is related to the word “angel,” which means “messenger.” In the story we read, God’s messenger, the angel, gives the women his *evangelion*, or good message. And they in turn were told to take it to others: Jesus’ body is not in the tomb. “He is risen!”

And Christ Himself will soon appear to the male disciples to give that message unmistakable confirmation. Then He will command them to deliver the message to others, who will in turn take it to more persons, some of whom will spread it to nations who do not understand Greek. About six centuries later, the good message will reach the Anglo-Saxons, which, in their language, is “Godspell,” since then shortened to “Gospel.” That Jesus rose from the dead is our Good News.

Our first reading today, from The Acts of the Apostles, captures the moment when the Glad Tidings of the Messiah’s dying for our sins and rising to give us new life go from one of the original Jewish disciples, St Peter, to a group of Roman

soldiers. Now if you go back a ways, before the place where we began reading in chapter 10, you will see that the moment captured here has quite a lead-up. Peter, the leader of the apostles, has been preaching to only Jews, his countrymen, the descendants of Abraham whom God had chosen for certain privileges. Peter proclaimed the Good News of Jesus' death and Resurrection to them for, oh, maybe seven or eight years. He understood himself to be preparing the Jewish nation for the risen Messiah's Return to take His rightful place as their King, and eventually as the emperor of the whole world, ruling over the other nations also — whether they wanted to be ruled by the Jewish Messiah or not. Yes, Peter heard Jesus' commission to make disciples of the "Gentiles" — the Latin word for nations — but the leader of the apostles, in his zeal to spread the Good News to his fellow Jews, seems to have forgotten all about that Great Commission. He and the other apostles have been forming and building up congregations of Jews who accepted the News, not only in Jerusalem, but also throughout the rest of Judea, and even a few in the Diaspora beyond.

In this story from The Acts, Peter has made a journey to Lydda and Joppa on the coast, to attend to the Messianic congregations there. While in Joppa, at noon one day, he climbs a ladder to go to the rooftop of the house where he is staying, so that he can pray there by himself for a while, before lunch. After beginning to pray, Peter falls into a trance, and sees a great sheet descend from the sky. In it are "animals and reptiles and birds of the air." —"Rise, Peter; kill and eat," the voice tells him.

I can't do that, Peter replies; for I am a Jew. I know from the Torah that those unclean meats are for unclean people, the Gentiles. We, the Chosen People, eat only what is kosher.

The voice: "What God has made clean, do not call common."

Now, what does that mean? Peter will soon find out. Three men, all of them Gentiles, are standing at the gate, and the Spirit tells him to go with them. They take Peter northward, up the coast, to Caesarea, the administrative center of

the Roman governor of most of Palestine. And they enter the house of Cornelius, centurion of the Italian Cohort, who has also had a vision. There are a group of soldiers there with their commander, and Peter speaks:

You know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. . . . Now why did you send for me?

Well, Cornelius answered,

tell me whatever God has sent you to say. Four days ago, an angel told me to send for you. Now here we are, in the presence of God, to hear your message.

Then it dawns on Peter. The Gospel, oh, yes, the Gospel. — I've been sent here to preach the Gospel, the Good News that the women gave me eight years ago, who had received that message from the angel at the tomb, who had been sent by God to deliver it to them! In our first reading today, you heard the speech that the Apostle then made: At the Jordan River, where John was baptizing, God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit. Then He preached "good news of peace" in both Galilee and Jerusalem, and healed "all who were oppressed by the Devil, for God was with Him." But the Jews, my countrymen, "put Him to death . . . on a tree." God, however, "raised Him on the third day and made Him to appear" to those of us He chose as witnesses. Yes, we "ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead." And Jesus commanded us to preach this to people, and inform them that God appointed Him "to be judge of the living and the dead." Our prophets wrote many centuries earlier "that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His Name.

That was St Peter's speech — or at least what St Luke chose to record of it. It contains the essentials, what Cornelius and the other Gentiles present needed to know. It was the Gospel, the *evangelion*, the Good News — a little bit more than what the angel told the women at the tomb, but they had been disciples and already knew of Jesus' anointing with the Spirit, the preaching and healing that

followed, and of course the death on the Cross which they witnessed. Yet, if you put a stopwatch on Peter's remarks to persons who didn't know much of anything of Jesus' story, except a few rumors, they hardly took more time to deliver than what we today would call an "elevator speech" — the time it takes to arrive at your floor and the doors to open. It might go like this: "Hello, I'm Tom, and I'm here from Amazon to tell folks who work here about the gigantic warehouse and transport center we are building in Nampa. It will provide 10,000 new jobs in the Treasure Valley, and no worker will earn less than \$15 per hour with benefits. Do you think you would like to work with us on this — because if you don't, we are going to crush you!"

Well, news about a new business in town can be good — but maybe not for all people. The Easter message, however, the one that cheered us when someone first told us, and that we in turn are now charged to deliver to others, "Christ's body does not lie in a tomb; He is risen!" — that is a message that is Good News to everyone. Why are we keeping it to ourselves? Or why do we deliver it to only people we are comfortable with, those whom we regard as "clean"? If you tell someone, and he or she doesn't want to hear, our reaction should be, "This person has a problem. Maybe if I have lunch with him next week, buy him a glass of wine, and get him to talk about what's bugging him, he won't be so ready to dismiss Good News.

The Internet and airwaves are full of doom and gloom — global warning, the coming run-away inflation, a possible invasion of Taiwan, more strains of the coronavirus that our vaccines might be powerless against, and on and on, more doom and gloom. The left is taking over. Democrats control the media. No, the right is taking over. Republicans control the courts. — Friends, I am not recommending that we stop our ears and cease to learn of the world's affairs, but if we receive it all as bad news and allow it to depress us, then it is time for us to put our attention elsewhere. The Kingdom will endure. The world will not. So for the sake of your own sanity, hear the Good News: Christ who was crucified now lives

for evermore! And we who accept that His Sacrifice was for us and confess our sins in order to be absolved by it — we will be resurrected, and live in a world governed by Him evermore. Live by that truth and be joyful, taking the world's ills in stride. They are but temporary maladies.

And when we live thus, in the light of Christ's Resurrection, we will want to tell others about it — our family, friends, and neighbors. The preaching of the Gospel that began with the angel in the sepulcher should be completed by us. Let's do it. Use Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, as your example. Prepare your elevator speech and keep it handy. Here's mine: "Jesus, the Messiah foretold by the prophets of Israel, was born of a virgin in Bethlehem and anointed with the Spirit after His baptism in the Jordan. He taught people about the Kingdom He came to establish, and showed it to them by healing and doing good. The authorities who were threatened by that turned the visitors to Jerusalem for the Passover against Him, who then called for His death. Jesus allowed Himself to be crucified so that He might die for our sins and thus erase our guilt before God. He was buried, and on the third day arose in a body infused with new life, which He now offers to share with any who believe, repent of their sins, and are baptized."

That was a little longer than it needed to be, but I am, after all, a preacher. Go ahead and prepare your own short version of the Gospel, and then find your Cornelius, the one to whom the Spirit sends you. Persons everywhere are dying for some Good News.

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