

CAN BAD NEWS BE GOOD NEWS?

(Luke 3: 7-18)

Intro: Can bad news be good news?

Luke concludes our Gospel lesson.

-Speaking of John the Baptizer.

-With these words:

#"With many other exhortations,"

"He proclaimed the good news to the people."

*Luke 3:18.

I. Where Is The Good News?

A. With John The Baptizer.

1. He speaks of:
 - a. Vipers.
 - b. Ax.
 - c. Fire.
2. To the crowds who came to him for baptism.
 - a. John said:
 - “You BOVs!”
 - “You brood of vipers!”
 - “You snakes in the grass!”
 - “What are you doing here?”
 - b. John seems to have:
 - Flunked Pastoral Care 101.
 - Missed out on the Dale Carnegie course:
 - #How to Win Friends and Influence People.
 - c. This does not seem to be a good recipe for:
 - Church growth.
 - Welcoming of newcomers.
 - d. Where is the good news?
3. To those who claimed to have special connections:
 - a. Saying:
 - “We have Abraham as our ancestor.”
 - “We’re life-long Lutherans.”
 - “We’re charter members of this congregation.”
 - b. John threatened:
 - To get out the ax.
 - To start chopping at the roots.

- c. Remember Alex Haley.
 - His popular family history.
 - #From 30+ years ago.
 - *Book.
 - *Mini series.
 - #Stories of:
 - *Kunta Kinte.
 - *Chicken George.
 - He called it:
 - #*Roots*.
- d. John wanted to take an ax to the roots.
 - Where is the good news?
- 4. To those who didn't bear fruits worthy of repentance.
 - a. Who didn't:
 - Shape up and fly right.
 - Practice what they preached.
 - b. John threatened them with fire.
 - Where is the good news?

B. With The Promised Messiah.

- 1. There were some who thought John might be the Messiah.
 - a. John said:
 - “No.”
 - “Not me.”
 - “There's another one.”
 - #“Mightier one.”
 - #“More powerful one.”
 - b. That's good news, isn't it?
- 2. Or is it?
 - a. John talks about the Messiah and more fire.
 - “I baptize you with water.”
 - #“He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”
 - *Luke 3: 16.
 - “He has a pitch fork in his hands.”
 - #“He's going to clear the threshing floor.”
 - #“He's going to burn the chaff in unquenchable fire.”
 - b. So where is the good news?

II. Can Bad News Ever Be Good News?

A. Fire Is Not All Bad.

1. Yes, fire can destroy.
 - a. But that's not all it does.
 - b. Fire can also:
 - Warm.
 - Purify.
 - Enlighten.
2. First time I went to Yellowstone National Park.
 - a. 1990.
 - b. Two years after the massive fires.
 - Burned for most of the summer.
 - #1988.
 - Burned out of control for about a month.
 - #Closing the park.
 - #Threatening Old Faithful Inn.
 - Continued to smolder for another month.
 - #Burning 1.3 million acres altogether.
 - *900,000 acres in the park.
 - #Destroying 46 buildings.
 - #Killing wildlife that got trapped by the flames.
 - c. Friends who knew we were going to Yellowstone said:
 - “Too bad you couldn't have seen it before the fire.”
 - d. Actually:
 - We could see further into the forest.
 - #Because there had been fire.
 - We learned that fire could be good.
 - #Clearing out the underbrush.
 - #Causing cones of new seeds to pop open.
 - #Opening the forest canopy.
 - *So sunlight could reach the new growth.
 - +On the forest floor below.
 - So that when I returned to Yellowstone in 2005.
 - #I could see where there was:
 - *New life.
 - *New growth.
 - +Where there had been fire.
 - +Because there had been fire.

3. Where do we need fire so that new growth can burst forth?
 - a. Mutual Ministry Committee and I are engaged in a pastoral review process.
 - Something I asked for.
 - I'm grateful to the members of the committee.
 - #For working with me on this process.
 - I'm thankful to all of you.
 - #Who provided input to the Mutual Ministry folks.
 - I have to admit that this whole process is a little scary.
 - #For the 28 years I was a chaplain.
 - *I always had an annual review.
 - +So that in itself is not scary.
 - *But it was by one person.
 - +My supervisor.
 - =Who was himself:
 - Pastor.
 - Chaplain.
 - +Whom I trusted:
 - =I trusted:
 - Him.
 - Perspective.
 - Experience.
 - Expertise.
 - #I've never done this in a congregation.
 - *When I asked for the evaluation.
 - +I had no idea.
 - =All y'all would be asked for input.
 - +So I'm not exactly sure.
 - =What to expect.
 - *But I think this is a good and necessary process.
 - +To help me see.
 - =If my self-perceptions are accurate.
 - =If there are things I am not seeing by myself.
 - =If there are things that need to be burned.
 - =If there are areas where new life can bloom.
 - +So I'm hopeful.
 - =This will be a productive process.
 - =Even bad news can become good news.

- b. Could all of us benefit from a spiritual review committee?
 - Now there's a scary thought!
 - But don't you think there are things in each one of us?
 - #We don't see.
 - #Maybe don't want to see.
 - *Without the help of:
 - +Trusted friend.
 - +Spiritual advisor.
 - #But that need to be burned.
 - *So that new life can take root and grow.
 - *So that bad news can become good news.
- c. Could we as a congregation benefit from a spiritual review committee?
 - To help us see:
 - #What we maybe have a hard time seeing by ourselves.
 - #What needs to be burned.
 - #Where seeds of new life could be planted.
 - *So that bad news can become good news.
 - Right now I'm just planting a seed.
 - #I know that our Merger Committee.
 - *Has been thinking about a different name.
 - #Maybe we call them our Congregational Renewal Team.
 - *Does that light your fire?
 - There are outside resources to help with this process.
 - #Fire is not all bad.

B. An Ax Is Not All Bad.

1. Yes, an ax can be used:
 - a. To cut down a tree.
 - b. To chop up wood for a fire.
 - But fire can be good.
 - #As we've just seen.
 - Chopping down trees can be good.
2. Chopping down trees at their roots can be good.
 - a. Alex Haley's roots included several generations of slaves.
 - Isn't it a good thing to be liberated from the roots of slavery?
 - #Not from:
 - *Ancestors themselves.
 - *Memories or stories of those ancestors.
 - #But to be liberated from those roots.
 - *So that just because Alex Haley's ancestors were slaves.
 - *Doesn't mean that he had to be a slave.

- b. Who of us are children of Abraham?
 - Hebrews.
 - Jews.
 - #Probably none of us.
 - Isn't it a good thing to be liberated from the roots of Abraham?
 - #So that our relationship with God.
 - *Not dependent on our biology.
 - +Being born into the right:
 - =Race.
 - =Family.
 - =Church.
 - *But rather dependent on our faith.
 - +In the Messiah.
 - +In the one mightier than John.
 - +In the one nailed to a tree.
 - =Tree felled by an ax.
 - =Tree of execution.
 - =Tree of death.
 - +In the one who transformed:
 - =Crucifixion.
 - Into resurrection.
 - =Death.
 - Into life.
 - =Bad news.
 - Into good news.

C. Bad News Can Become Good News For Anyone.

- 1. Including:
 - a. Brood of vipers who came to John the Baptizer.
 - b. Tax collectors.
 - c. Soldiers.
- 2. When John the Baptizer tells them:
 - a. "Bear fruits worthy of repentance."
 - Luke 3:8.
 - b. Each in turn asks:
 - “What should we do?”
 - #Luke 3:10, 12, 14.
 - They ask collectively.
 - #Not:
 - *“What should I do?”
 - +That might be:
 - =American question.
 - =Individualistic question.

#But:

*"What should we do?"

+When all of the tax collectors adopt:

=Same standards.

=Same code of ethics.

=Same business practices.

-It's going to be:

#Easier for them individually.

#Better for society as a whole.

-Repentance will be universal.

+When all of the soldiers adopt:

=Same principles.

=Same code of conduct.

-It's going to be:

#Easier for them individually.

#Better for society as a whole.

-Repentance will be universal.

c. John tells them:

-Share.

-Be fair.

-Don't bully.

#That sounds like a lesson to be learned:

*In kindergarten.

*If not in pre-school.

#Who can't do that?

*If you have two shirts, share one.

#You don't need a whole wardrobe.

*To be able to share.

#Most people had two shirts.

*One for everyday.

+For work.

*One for special occasions.

+For the Sabbath.

*If you have the necessities of life.

#Share what you've got.

*Share.

*Be fair.

*Don't bully.

3. Bad news can become good news for:
 - a. Tax collectors.
 - b. Soldiers.
 - c. You.
 - d. Me.
 - In the waters of Holy Baptism.
 - #Chaff is burned.
 - #Wheat is gathered into the granary.
 - #Bad news becomes good news.
 - In the bread and wine of the Holy Supper.
 - #Chaff is burned.
 - #Wheat is gathered into the granary.
 - #Bad news becomes good news.

Concl: Let it be so.

- In Advent.
- In Christmas.
 - #In the Christ child.
 - #In us.

