

“We Live in a Good News/Bad News World”

Mark 1:9-15

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor
Smoke Rise Baptist Church
Stone Mountain, Georgia
March 1, 2009

We live in a good news/bad news world, don't we? Often we hear something that makes us happy only to be followed by news that makes us sad or angry. I suppose there is some consolation in the fact that it has always been this way.

I've often wondered how the father of the Prodigal Son felt after his son returned home. As soon as the homecoming party began, his servants told him that his other son had spiked an attitude and refused to join in the festivities. What a swing in emotions he had!

Our text takes us down this path of contrasting emotions, too. “Now after John was **arrested**, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the **good news** of God. The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news” Mark 1:14.

Do you see the contrast in this paragraph? John the Baptist, the last Old Testament prophet, was arrested for speaking truth to power and Jesus appeared on the scene proclaiming the good news of God. These two events produce radically different emotions. Any reader would feel sympathy for John the Baptist and joy for Jesus as he began his public ministry.

Why did Mark put these contrasting events with competing emotions in the same sentence? I understand his passion for brevity, but this seems almost absurd.

The more I thought about it last week, though, the more I appreciated what Mark did. I believe he was sending a message to his readers, including us, that we do not need to overlook. What is that? **As believers, it is our duty to balance bad news with good. While we must never live in denial, neither must we live without hope.**

Recently, I saw an interview with Danny Boyle, the director of the Academy Award winning film, *Slumdog Millionaire*. This film is about a young man from the slums of Mumbai, India who endures abject poverty, betrayal, loneliness and torture along his journey to find the love of his life, Latika.

When Boyle was asked by a reporter why this movie captured the hearts of Americans and won eight Academy Awards, including Best Picture, he replied, “I suppose it was because people are looking for hope in these difficult times.” Perhaps Mark felt the same way when he penned our text.

There is no question that the arrest that led to the execution of John the Baptist was horrible and disturbed all who followed him. He was a martyr who did nothing to deserve his fate. However, the dream of a better world did not end with John's passing. Another voice shattered the silence and carried on the dream of building a just and peaceful world. We know that to be the voice of our Lord.

Don't miss what Mark has done in our text. **He has followed bad news with good, despair with hope and fear with courage.** He would not let evil have the final word.

Why was it so important to Mark that he do this? His readers were carrying heavy burdens and facing persecution. Their commitment to living like Jesus was tested every day. I'm confident there was frightfully little good news, if any, in their lives.

Was it time to throw in the towel? Were the challenges to their faith too great? Was it impossible to be a faithful disciple in these perilous times? Had evil won?

No, it had not and it was not time to abandon their faith! Instead, it was time to add their voices to the conversation, offering hope to those in despair. It was time to confront evil with good and keep the dream alive. It was time to turn bad news into good by listening to aching hearts and responding with mercy, grace and compassion. I believe it is time for us to do so, too, especially in these uncertain and perilous days.

We live in a world saturated with bad news, don't we? It seems on every front, from the economy to international relations, the news is dismal. As Tom Ehrlich writes, “These are sour, sobering and scary times for many people. Not only are their assets dwindling, but so are their self-confidence and trust.”

As believers, what should our response be to these problems and challenges? Certainly, we do not need to live in denial. We don't need to minimize the gravity of the situation we are facing or ignore how we got here.

On the other hand, we need to follow Mark's lead and offer an alternative outlook and lifestyle. We need to confront evil with good and fear with courage, as Jesus did, and be the voice of hope as he was. We need to help people understand that no recession or disaster can take away what is really important in life: a vital faith, a life of integrity, a good name, a loving family, compassionate friends, helpful neighbors, an encouraging church, a supportive community, a welcoming heart, a forgiving spirit, and a passion for justice and peace. Now is the time to strengthen existing relationships and build bridges to new ones by being good neighbors and responsible citizens. We need God and each other and both are available even in a recession.

How do we add our voice to the conversation? How do we balance bad news with good and replace despair with hope? How do we confront evil with good? How did Jesus do it? With God's help, he did it one person at a time, taking advantage of every opportunity in the marketplace or along a dusty road to convey the goodness of God through word and deed. Daily, he looked to His Father for wisdom, guidance, faith, strength, courage, determination and patience.

Who needs to hear a good word from you this week? Who is struggling through one of the most difficult times of their life and living in utter despair? Is it someone that has lost their job, finalized a divorce, buried a loved one or received a bad health report? What could you say to them or do for them that would give them hope?

Did you read the front page story about Jake Compton on last Thursday's edition of the *Atlanta-Journal Constitution*? He lives under a tree in Winn Park and is a constant reminder that life is not always easy or fair.

Jerry Attkison, a retired real estate investor, worried about Compton. Was he warm enough? Did he have enough to eat?

Last June, Attkison approached Compton and told him that he would pay him \$2.00 for every pile of mulch the homeless man would spread in the park. Compton agreed and started working. To date, Compton has made over \$4,000 and is now doing other work in the park. He has a bank account, a cell phone and has his eye on a nice little place to live on Piedmont Avenue.

"I've met some nice people," said Compton. "Hopefully things are looking up for me."

I believe this is what it means to turn bad news into good. This is what hope looks like.

Who is trying to do this for you? Who is reaching out to you and trying to encourage you? Who is offering you their help and counsel? Are you listening?

I have noticed that many times hope comes from the unlikeliest places. Who would have thought that a Galilean carpenter by the name of Jesus could have lifted his people from despair two thousand years ago? Who would have predicted that good news would come from such a commoner? He was the unlikeliest of candidates.

Your bearer of good news may surprise you, too. Listen carefully to all that pass your way. They may be God's messenger of hope and healing.