

What's the best headline you could imagine?

- For me, it might be "ISIS surrenders power in all of its territories"
- Or "Refugee camps across the globe are dismantled because everyone has food, homes, and work"
- (what are some of yours?)

This would be good news, wouldn't it.

Each of these indicate areas of struggle, turmoil

circumstances that make life poorer than God intends.

And if these were true headlines, they would be gospel,

good news from the battlefield.

For that is what the gospel – the good news – is.

If we did a Bible study on the Greek word "euangelion" and its Hebrew counterpart "basar",

We would discover that good news is spoken to a losing team,

to a people taken prisoner in battle --

- Battle against geopolitical forces
- Battle against spiritual forces
- Battle against personal compulsions

The Good News of which the Prophet Isaiah speaks in 40:9

Go on up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good news;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good news;

lift it up, fear not;
say to the cities of Judah,
“Behold your God!”

And which Mark opens with: The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ...

Is the good news –the Gospel – only God can declare.

It is not just any good news,

not some greeting card sentiment

or words spoken simply because we want to hear them –

No – this Gospel is the good news of everything being put right.

- Everything evil coming to an end.
- Every death-dealing disease and demon being overthrown.

Good News – Gospel – is a new thing. God's new thing.

A new beginning

– a new life from the ashes of struggle.

No wonder John isn't clothed in his Sunday best

and being the invited celebrity speaker at the temple in Jerusalem.

He is the herald of the Good News.

He is the announcer of God's news of victory for the people losing the struggle against sin, death, and evil.

Like the shepherd boy David, who went up against the giant Goliath with just a sling and 5 stones, John put on a simple tunic of hair and ate locusts and wild honey.

With this most meager of sustenance, John had the most effective thing of all-- God's Word.

Someone mightier than I is coming –

I have done the little I can – cleansing you with water to symbolically purify you from your sins –

- *But He will immerse you in the Holy Spirit – **and thereby truly remove your sins from you.***
- He will saturate you with the Holy Spirit who gives life where death once conquered.
- He will inhabit you with the Holy Spirit who makes the healing presence of God happen in the world.

Jesus, the Son of God, is the new thing God is doing among us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

...

Before the theologian in me gets too carried away,

let's just stop to notice that God doesn't wait until his people have gotten their act together to bring them good news,

The Gospel is not the trophy for a winning team.

No – **God is present in the struggle**

– in the midst of the wilderness of this life.

God is here where we bear the burdens of pain

and struggle against the evil forces within and around us.

John appears in the wilderness announcing the Good News of Jesus.
And Jesus is born in a manger and dies on a cross.

**And he baptizes us with the Holy Spirit of resurrection – new life –
God's new thing.**

The Good News is that in Jesus, God shares our mortal struggle and makes us share his immortal life.

...

Our congregation, like Israel in exile and Israel under Roman rule, has struggled for vitality.

- We look around at empty pews, graying heads, and overwhelming building needs and costs and wonder how much longer we can survive.
- It's like looking at John the Baptist in the wilderness and wondering how long he could survive on locusts and wild honey and just one change of clothes.
- It is easy to get sucked into an attitude of scarcity – of lamenting that we don't have enough.
- I struggle with this temptation too.
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- But John was not deterred.
- He did not focus on what he did not have
- and lament that he couldn't carry out his mission for lack of food or clothing.

John knew he had just what he needed – his mouth and the word of God to announce.

And what is sufficient for John is also sufficient for us.

...

God is present in the midst of our struggle and is calling us to join in the new thing he is doing.

We don't have to figure out what our mission is

because **Jesus is already doing God's mission**

— and by baptizing us with his Holy Spirit, Jesus calls and invites us to be part of it.

Ed Stetzer, a church leader of the movement to increase the church's capacity to share the Good News with others, has said;

While it's common for people to say, "The church has a mission," a better way to talk about mission is "God's mission has a church" ([Ephesians 3:7–13](#))

God's mission, as Jesus has told us, is for all nations to become his followers.

That is, for all people to be part of the

- healing,
- reconciling,
- peacemaking,
- gracious love of God in our world.

The future for St. Peter's, then, does not lie in filling the pews and paying the bills;

- Our future lies in becoming **more effective participants in God's mission here in metropolitan York.**

- to embody the love of God to one another and to our neighbors.

Our future lies in recognizing that Jesus is immersing us in his Holy Spirit **not simply to save us,**

but to draw others to salvation *through us.*

Jesus comes and baptizes us with water and the Holy Spirit

to give us life

and everything we need to be part of God's mission

for us to *be* the Good News in our community.

The R3 renewal process is equipping us as a congregation to more effectively be the hands and feet and voice of God in this world.

By trying new things,

being church in new ways,

and sharing our faith,

we are learning how to participate in God's mission.

Isn't that great?

Isn't that a wonderful reason to be part of the church?

Isn't that a great motivation to invite others to be part of God's mission, too?

At the R3 workshop yesterday, someone came up to me and said – I read about you in the newspaper – a front page article.

The headline reads “Nearly 200 served Thanksgiving meal at North York church”.

What a wonderful witness to being part of God’s mission!

There are other headlines-- though not printed in any newspaper.

- “Nearly 100 hear the Good News of Jesus Christ every Sunday in North York Church”
- “Small crowd is fed the Bread of Life in North York”
- “Jesus forgives sins and lays hands on the sick to heal them in North York church”

Truly *this* is the Good News of Jesus Christ, Son of God

– and **it happens here.**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen