

Sermon

Good News!

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Athelstone Uniting Church #55

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Text: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Pray

Please pray with me:

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Recap

We've been reading Paul's first letter to the Corinthians

We had the image of the body of Christ – with many parts - Each with their own unique role, with their own unique gifts . Every one of those gifts, a gift of the Spirit – not for the good of the individual – but for the good of the whole body.

Last week was all about love.. agape love .. unconditional love ..sacrificial love

It is the love that God has for us, exemplified by Jesus in his death on a cross.

He died because he loved us - willing to give himself for the sake of us, with no promise of reward for himself.

It is love demonstrated in Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection

The Good News

And that brings us to this week's reading. Paul switches his focus to the gospel – the good news – the centre of the Christian faith.

He begins by reminding his brothers and sisters – fellow believers - in Corinth that this is the same gospel that he preached to them in the past, the same gospel that they received, the same gospel on which they stand. He encourages them to hold firmly to this word.

The good news for Paul here is that Christ died for our sins , that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day . He goes on to speak of all who witnessed this, and how that message was passed on.

So what does gospel or good news mean to you?

We use this term so much in church world, don't we?

If you were put on the spot, and I'm not going to do that to you, but if you were asked, what would you say is the good news? The gospel message?

Each of us have or may have heard the gospel proclaimed in different ways from different sources:

Through preaching in this church and others, through reading God's Word, through Bible study and reflection, through liturgy in worship – especially in the communion prayer, where we thankfully remember what Jesus has done

for us. And we hear the gospel in the words of the hymns and songs we sing each week and the creeds we say together.

So, each of us could come up with a slightly different description of the good news.

a Generous Orthodoxy

Our book club has recently started reading a Brian McLaren book called “a Generous Orthodoxy”.

In his chapter about Jesus, McLaren talks about how over his lifetime so far, he has come to know Jesus in different ways through his connections and relationships with different church traditions. And he summarises – in very simple terms - what he thinks different church traditions say are the good news.

As I read about 6 of these for you, have a listen and think about which ones you find familiar and which ones you have not heard expressed before, which ones you identify with, and which ones don't quite fit for you:

McLaren first heard the good news through **Conservative Protestant (or Evangelical) Churches:**

The good news centres on the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus saves us by dying on the cross.

By dying, Jesus mysteriously absorbs the penalty of all humans wrongdoing through all of history. The cross becomes the focal point where human injustice – past, present and future – meets the unconquerable compassion and forgiveness of God. Jesus' innocent self-sacrifice somehow cancels out human guilt. By dying, Jesus opens the door, not just to heaven beyond this life, but to true communion and relationship with God, in this life – whoever you are, whatever you've done.

So, the good news for conservative protestant churches, according to McLaren is that:

Jesus' death pays the full penalty for human sin.

Does that sound like good news to you?

McLaren then heard the good news through the **Pentecostal or Charismatic churches:**

The good news centres on Jesus who is up close, present, and dramatically involved in daily life. Jesus saves by his powerful presence in this present moment. The Holy Spirit is the real presence of Jesus.

So, the good news for Pentecostal or charismatic churches, according to McLaren is that:

Jesus teaches us how to receive miracles and healings from God through faith in God's promises.

Does that sound like good news to you?

McLaren then heard the good news through the **Roman Catholic church:**

Jesus saves the church by rising from the dead. through the resurrection, God has defeated death and all that comes with it. By entering life's worst – suffering and death – and breaking through it, Jesus opens the way to heaven, to life with God beyond this life.

Jesus is risen and alive, intersecting with our lives on earth, and waiting for us beyond this life.

In this view, Christians are especially aware of how the risen Jesus continues to encounter his followers through public worship, and especially through the Eucharist (communion) – which is one reason why communion is so important to Roman Catholic Christians and to Anglicans too. The eucharist is seen as a constant celebration of good news, a continual rendezvous with the risen Christ, and through him, with God.

So, the good news for Roman Catholic churches, according to McLaren is that:

Jesus' resurrection defeats death and liberates humanity.

Does that sound like good news to you?

McLaren then heard the good news through the **Eastern Orthodox churches:**

Who celebrate the Trinity – using the term perichoresis – peri – circle and choresis – dance – the Trinity was an eternal circle dance of Father, Son and Spirit sharing mutual love, honor, happiness, joy, and respect. God's act of creation means that God is inviting more and more beings into the eternal dance of joy. Sin means that people are stepping out of the dance, corrupting its beauty and rhythm, crashing and tackling and stomping on feet instead of moving with grace, rhythm and reverence. Then, in Jesus, God enters creation to restore the rhythm and beauty again.

So, the good news for the Eastern Orthodox churches, according to McLaren is that:

Jesus' entry into humanity and history brings God's healing to the human race and all of creation.

Does that sound like good news to you?

McLaren then heard the good news through the **Liberal Protestant church:**

For whom the gospel centers on the words and deeds of Jesus Christ – the story of his life, between his birth and his death and resurrection. His teachings and acts of love, healing, justice, and compassion offer a way of life that if practiced bring blessings to the whole world.

So, the good news for the Liberal Protestant churches, according to McLaren is that:

Jesus' example and teachings inspire us to work compassionately for social justice.

Does that sound like good news to you?

McLaren then heard the good news through the **Anabaptist church:**

Anabaptist Christians find the heart of the gospel in the teachings of Jesus – and in particular – the ethical teachings of Jesus. They feel their calling is to live out Jesus' teachings about how we are to conduct our daily lives, especially in relation to our neighbours

So, the good news for Anabaptist Christians, according to McLaren is that:

Jesus convenes a learning community of disciples who seek to model lives of love and peace.

Does that sound like good news to you?

All of these are generalisations through McLaren's personal perspective – but I hope what they have done is to help you think a little about how you understand the good news of Jesus Christ.

In the Uniting Church you will find that there is a broad range of understandings of the gospel – we are a confessing movement of the Protestant church – yet we agree with many of the teachings of other churches too.

So what is it that each have in common?

Each one is focused on Jesus! ..and how God has reached out to us in love through Jesus.

Last week I said it was all about Love – well this week, I'm saying, it's all about Jesus! The perfect expression of agape love.

Soon we will be commissioning our church council members

According to the UCA constitution:

The Church Council shall give priority in its life to building up the Congregation in faith and love, sustaining members in hope, and leading the Congregation to a fuller participation in Christ's mission in the world.

All of this needs to be undergirded by the good news expressed in Jesus Christ.

And this good news is lived out

- As we live in a close, loving, personal, dynamic relationship with the living God;
- As we participate in the worshipping, caring and serving community of Christians;
- As we receive God's gifts through the Spirit so that life can be what God means it to be - loving, purposeful, joyful, eternal; and
- And as we tell others of this good news and live it out in acts of compassion, service and justice in the community.

Together it is our role to lead our congregation to live this out in Christ's name.

At the synod meeting yesterday we passed a number of proposals that express the good news through acts of compassion, service and justice in the community.

Through initiatives to make us more environmentally friendly, to raise awareness about domestic violence and sexual abuse, to ask for fair treatment and mercy for asylum seekers living in Australia, and to call on the Government to increase the level of the Newstart payment

Each, examples of the Uniting Church's way of sharing God's love for all of God's creation.

Have you heard of ear worms? When a song or melody gets stuck in your head and you can't get rid of it?

Sometimes people do it on purpose where they sing an annoying melody and you're stuck with it in your head for hours!

Sometimes I feel like God places an earworm in my head:

A song that I can't let go of

For a few weeks now, I've had a particular song stuck in my head so I've asked Di to find it and for the worship team to learn it for us

As they come up...

This song was written by Shirley Erena Murray

Through her song, she presents a Christian equivalent to the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," drafted by the U.N. General Council, connecting the global concern of Christianity with the global concerns of the United Nations and, indeed, all humanity.. Her goal was to put them in a context which relates directly to the Gospel - demonstrating the relevance of Christianity with the issues the world is facing today.

Let me read the opening words to you:

For everyone born, a place at the table,
for everyone born, clean water and bread,
a shelter, a space, a safe place for growing
for everyone born, a star overhead,
and God will delight when we are creators
of justice and joy, compassion and peace.

At first listen, the song appears as if it about global hunger, which indeed it is. But on another level, she clearly expresses that the justice and equality that people need actually comes as a result of the birth of Jesus Christ.

She plays with our understanding of what “the table” actually means.

It’s not simply a dining table or a political forum (such as the United Nations), but it’s also a metaphor for the Kingdom of God.

The table represents a world where everyone has a place, because God became human in Jesus Christ, expressed by the star on Christmas night.¹

So, as a response to the Word, I invite you to listen as the worship team sing some of this powerful song for you. The words will be up on the screen and you are welcome to join in if you wish. Please remain seated – and may you hear the good news through these words. Amen

here is a version with lyrics

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmUIJvzRaI4>

And you can listen to a reflective version of the song here:

<https://soundcloud.com/tom-trenney/for-everyone-born-a-place-at-the-table>

¹ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-a-place-at-the-table>