

Good News  
Dec. 24, 2008  
Luke 2: 8-14

Several years ago a schoolteacher assigned to visit children in a large hospital received a routine call requesting that she visit a child there. She took the boy's name and room number and was told by the classroom teacher that the class was studying nouns and adverbs. She'd like the hospital teacher to help him with his homework so he wouldn't fall too far behind.

When the visiting teacher got to his room, it was in the burn unit and the boy was horribly burned and in great pain. She felt she couldn't just turn and walk out, so she awkwardly told him she was there to help him with his nouns and adverbs. The boy was in such pain he couldn't respond much, but she gave him some of the lesson anyway, ashamed of putting him through a senseless exercise.

The next morning a nurse on the burn unit asked her, "What did you say to that boy?" She tried to apologize but the nurse interrupted. "You don't understand. We've been very worried about him. But ever since you were here yesterday, his whole attitude has changed. He's fighting back, responding to treatment. It's as though he's decided to live."

The boy later explained that he had completely given up hope until he saw that teacher. It all changed when he came to a simple realization. With joyful tears he said it this way: "They wouldn't send a teacher to work on nouns and adverbs with a dying boy, would they?"

(from 3/30/86 sermon)

That teacher brought good news to that boy. He wasn't dying.

The shepherds got good news. And the real meaning of Christmas is not presents and parties. The real meaning is the angel's message, the good news. God lives with us.

The angels came to people in poverty and under the oppressive rule of a foreign power. They thought times were bad. But the angel brought good news that God was coming to live with them. God wouldn't come to dying people would he?

The good news is for us too. Times are bad with war and recession. But God wouldn't come to a dying country, would he? He wouldn't come to dying people, would he?

Good news. The newspaper brings it.

Ripon High school students drink less than other high schoolers. They do better on their college entry tests than students in other area high schools. Not only wise, but smart. Quad Graphics and Pick N Save are donating to food pantries and Alliant Energy is matching gifts of employees to charities.

I love good news. I said it in an article in today's Ripon Commonwealth. I said I love it when the nurse tells me the premature baby has gone home from the hospital. I love it when a laid off friend finds a job. I love to hear of my family's successes.

I love to see the promises of the Bible break out in daily lives. I see friends forgive each other. I see people bring comfort to those who mourn. I see the heartbroken rise to new life after the death of a spouse. All because the angel was right. God is with us.

The angel's message was "Don't be afraid, I bring you good news". We heard what the angel said to the women who came looking for Jesus' dead body. Good news, he is risen.

The good news is that God provides us with a way to resist fear. The year will bring plenty of chances to be afraid. We can fear losing job and money, culture change, immigrants, attacks, disease and much more. The media, mailings, and radio talkers are making money by scaring us. The more afraid we are, the more attention and money we give them. But resurrection after death is the good news that can carry us past any fear.

The message is good news. God lives with us.

The shakeup in the world's economy that is going on now will be painful, but in the long run, will be healthy. We will all learn how to live on less. We will learn how to enjoy life without buying as many things. We will learn how to count on each other rather than trying to be independent. All those lessons are biblical lessons. Interdependence and anti-materialism are Biblical values. Recession is not death, it is opportunities for new life. The changes in our lives will be good news, even though they are painful now.

God with us is such good news that we want to feel it inside. We know it in our heads, but it is too good just to leave there. How do we sense it and feel and know it in our hearts? Common sense cannot understand it. It takes uncommon sense to get it in there.

The paper told us last week about Dave Minor, who works in administration at the college. The installation of an African American, like himself, as president, is so important to him that he's not content to be happy with it just in his head. He wants to feel it inside. So he's going to Washington for the inauguration. He knows he'll be just one of thousands. He knows it will be expensive and frustrating dealing with the crowds, but, it is such an important event to him, he wants to be there. To see it with his own eyes, to hear it first hand, not just through the TV.

See it, feel it, in order to get it in here.

In order to "get" the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, uncommon sense is necessary. It's what happens to people in the hospital when they pray and then get a calm assurance that God is bringing them through the danger. It's what happens to the characters in CS Lewis' Narnia stories when they see Aslan defeat the evil. Uncommon sense.

I said in the newspaper article the most popular service of the year for many in our church is not Christmas Eve or Easter. It is the Sunday School Christmas program. Only when we see Christmas through the eyes of a child, can we "get" God with us. For children, and the childlike among us, it makes perfect uncommon sense.

And so, even when it goes against common sense, I bring you good news.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote a Christmas Carol about the bells on Christmas day. He wrote it during the American civil war. He wrote about cannons shooting. He wrote about dead soldiers, which made forlorn the households born of peace on earth. He wrote "in despair I bowed my head. There is no peace on earth. For hate is strong and mocks the song". But then he "heard the bells more loud and deep. God is not

dead, nor doth he sleep. The wrong shall fail, the right prevail with peace on earth, good will to men.”

Children are adopted. Soldiers are coming home to their families. There is good news. People are finding ways to live on less. The wrong fails and the right prevails.

Are you having a tough time? Are you afraid? There's good news. You are not dying. God wouldn't come to a dying person, would he?

They wouldn't send a teacher to a dying boy, would they? God wouldn't come to a dying person, would he? Good news, God with us.