

BAD NEWS, GOOD NEWS! John 6:35-51

You've all heard the bad news good news jokes. A plane is flying through a storm the captain comes on over the speaker system and says. I've got bad news and I've got good news. The bad news is that we're hopelessly lost and running out of fuel, the good news is that we are making good time.

In his Large Catechism, Luther claims that the entire Gospel depends on the birth, passion, resurrection and ascension of Christ. "If any one asks what do you believe in the 2nd article about Jesus Christ?"...answer as briefly as possible. "I believe that Jesus Christ, true Son of God, has become my Lord". "Lord," Luther affirms, simply means Redeemer.

"for Christ has brought us back from the devil to God,
from death to life,
from sin to righteousness,
and keeps us there."

In Luther's sermon on the Magnificat, (Mary's Song) he writes,
"Just as God in the beginning of creation made the world out of nothing, whence he is called the Creator and the Almighty, so his manner of working continues unchanged. Even now to the end of the world, all his works are such that out of that which is nothing, worthless, despised, wretched, and dead, He makes that which is something, precious, honorable, blessed and living. On the other hand, whatever is something, precious, honorable, blessed and living; He makes to be nothing, worthless, despised, wretched, and dying. In this manner no creature can work, no creature can produce anything out of nothing.

It sketches the good news in Christ as God's manner of working in the world, the bread of life as it were, in which God forgives the sinner and gives life to the dead.

With these simple words, we are introduced into the center of Luther's thinking. The God who is for me and for my salvation is and can be none other than the Jesus of the gospels. And in the work of redemption this Jesus is revealed to be none other than God who created heaven and earth and brings eternal life to the sinful dead. To summarize: to be God is to redeem from sin, death, and the devil.

This weeks Gospel offers us bad news and it offers us Good news.

The bad news is in verse 44, Jesus is speaking, "No one can come to me unless the Father draws him." The good news is also in verse 44, "No one can come to me unless the Father draws him."

The good news and the bad news is that faith in Christ is itself a gift from the Father. Jesus says it again in verse 65: “No one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” But is that bad news? Some of his disciples apparently thought so. Verse 66 says, “After this, many of his disciples drew back and no longer went around with him.” Only the 12 remained. This is the first time in the Gospel of John that the disciples are numbered as twelve, “Will you go away also?” Peter answered, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.” Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you?” It’s familiar to us because it’s a verse we often sing just before the Gospel.

There it is again, the bad news and the good news: the choice is not ours, but his.

It’s not that we chose him, but that he chose us.

Still, how is that bad news? It’s bad news, because part of us begins to think, “Well that’s all very nice, grace alone, God chooses us, and all, but I have some say in this too. I have to accept it. I’m not a puppet on a string; I have free will.” “Wait a minute,” we say, “what does it mean, “no one comes to Jesus unless the Father draws him? I’m an intelligent, self sufficient person; I have some freedom you know. I have my independence. How could St. Paul say, ‘No one says “Jesus is Lord” except by the Spirit?’”

Part of us hates it like poison; it’s bad news, Mother, I’d rather do it myself.” What do you mean, God chose us for himself before we could even make any kind of decision? We have our pride, you know.

Ah, pride: that’s the sad truth. We will not let God be God. We will not let God be all powerful, for we want some of that power for ourselves, and a little freedom, a little free choice, and then perhaps a little credit for making the right choice. That pride is the old Adam in us, our sinful nature, our self centered pride, arrogantly bound to our self interest. But our will is not free; it is in bondage to sin and cannot free itself. Our will is in bondage to itself and cannot free itself.

God’s Word that is leading us to Christ is by his will and graciousness alone, it is bad news to our pride, and we don’t want to hear it. We don’t want to hear that God has simply decided for us, and so we hide behind two smokescreens.

First we object, “Well, what about all the people in the world who have never heard of Jesus?” We can’t hide there, “This is not a general message about others, but digs into your heart, and mine. Can you honestly take credit for your faith as some free-will decision? Looking back, can we not see God leading us, giving us faith?”

Secondly, we complain, “Can that mean that everything in life is predestined, prearranged, predetermined? That nothing is free? That won’t work either. Were not talking about everything, about whether you like ketchup or mustard, about things on our level. We’re talking about our relationship with the Creator of heaven and earth. Is God in charge or not? Do we proudly hold out for a little corner where we are in charge or do we praise God as Lord and thank God for choosing us by living lives of service?”

The word of God’s choice for you, that no one comes to Jesus unless the Father grants it, can be good news too. Part of us hates it as bad news for we want to keep our precious pride and free will. That’s the Old Adam in us, but part of us welcomes it as good news, as a relief, and that’s the new you, the faith that God gave you in Baptism, that is now starting to grow. It can be great and comforting news that being safe in his loving arms does not depend on our fickle choice, which goes up and down like a yo-yo, but on his choice and his love, which shall never be moved.

He chose us, he baptized us, and he will keep us in his hand.

Jesus said later in John, “My sheep hear my voice...My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.” Now is that bad news or good news? Jesus said, “No one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” It’s bad news for the proud old Adam, and good news, for the new you and me that God is forming. It means certainty, based on God’s act, and not our own weak will.

In the Epistle this morning we see the direction your life will take because God chose you. (Ephesians 4:17-5:2)

It’s like this, we come to imitate God and forgive as we have been forgiven. Donald Tippett was the pastor of the Church of All Nations on the lower east side of New York City. One Saturday three youths came into the church. They beat Tippett severely, gouged out one of his eyes and dumped him, a bloody mess, behind a radiator. That’s where someone found him later and rushed him to the hospital.

Meanwhile the three boys went upstate and pulled a robbery, during which one of them shot and killed a man. The three were apprehended and the killer eventually executed.

Rev. Tippett who had every reason to hate these youths, succeeded in getting the other two boys paroled to him, and he treated them as sons. One failed to respond, but the other did, and that young man went on to school and became (of all things)...an eye surgeon.

Do you suppose he ever goes into an operating room without thanking God for the grace shown him through the one eyed Donald Tippett, the grace that saved even an undeserving wretch like him? “I was blind, but now I see.”

Frederick Buechner described grace this way:

Grace is something you can never get but only be given.

The grace of God means something (God saying to us) Here is your life. You might never have been but you are because the party wouldn't have been complete without you. Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid. I am with you. Nothing can ever separate us. It's for you. I created the universe. I love you. How much do I love you, and then he spread his arms and died for you.

God tries in all of your history to tell you in his word when he sent down the Bread of Life from heaven, “I chose you!” What will you do with it? “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

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