**A Sermon by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer**

1 Corinthians 15:1-4

*‘The Gospel of first importance’*

**TEXT**

*‘Now I should remind you, brothers and sisters of the* ***good news****…’*

**INTRODUCTION**

Don’t you love getting good news?

Good news can brighten your day.

I wonder what’s most important good news you’ve ever received?

Perhaps the news of a successful pregnancy or a healthy birth…

Or of landing that dream job you were going for…

Perhaps the news from the bank that you’d paid off your mortgage…

Or news from the doctor that those test results are now all clear…

We love good news,

We need good news.

Because there’s so much bad news in the world,

Every time you turn on the tv it’s just one bad news story after another.

So much so that you can even go online and subscribe to alternative news agencies like the one called the ‘good news network’.

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Well friends,

Today I have,

not just some good news,

But *the* good news.

Good news that St Paul says is of ***first importance***…

Good news not just to brighten our day,

but to bring ***joy that lasts into eternity***…

The good news is that Jesus Christ died for your sins,

And he is risen from the dead.

This is the Gospel,

And so from our text today we’ll consider three simple things about this Gospel,

First consider the ***nature*** of it

Second, the ***content*** of it

And third, how we ***respond*** to it.

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**THE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL**

So first let’s think about the *nature* of the Christian Gospel.

And the way I want to make this point is to think about the difference between good news,

And good advice.

Because they’re different,

And some people think the central message of the Christian faith is only good advice,

But it’s not,

It’s first and foremost good news.

Now, good advice,

Is good!

I’ve received lots of good advice in my life,

Good practical tips that have helped me in all sorts of ways.

Look people in the eye…

Practice makes perfect…

Don’t bite the hand that feeds you…

All these sorts of things.

Some of these are profound and you work on them for your whole life.

But good news is something different from good advice.

Good advice basically gives you something to do,

Good news is about something that’s already happened,

It’s passed on to you,

You simply receive it.

Now don’t get me wrong,

There is a lot of good advice in the Bible.

There’s are laws and commandments,

There is a whole tradition of wisdom which is all about how to live,

Jesus and the Apostles gave us a lot of teaching,

Much of which you could call ‘good advice’.

But when it comes to the core of our faith,

When it comes to what is of ***first*** *importance*,

When it comes to the Gospel,

It’s not good advice,

but good news.

And this is so misunderstood that we need to return to this again and again.

Just the other day I heard a famous and extremely intelligent academic say that ‘Christianity is primarily an ethical framework’.

But that’s just not true!

And if ‘ethical frameworks’ are not your language,

The way the person on the street says this is that ‘Christianity is just another set of rules’.

But it’s not true!

Yes Christianity provides an ethical framework for life,

Yes Christianity has rules and commandments which we are to strive to follow as Christian people,

But they’re not the core of our faith,

they’re not of first importance,

they are not the Gospel,

because the Gospel is good news,

not good advice.

So then,

What is this good news?

What is the *content* of this Gospel?

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**THE CONTENT OF THE GOSPEL**

Well,

these first few verses in 1 Corinthians 15 are probably the most succinct summary you get.

And it’s really just four things,

Or even two pairs:

*‘that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,*

*And that he was buried,*

*And that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,*

*And that he appeared to many’.*

So in it’s simplest form this is the Gospel - the good news,

Jesus’ death/burial,

and resurrection/appearance.

Where in each case the second part confirms the first.

So the first pair is death and burial.

*‘Christ died for* ***your*** *sins according to the Scriptures…’*

In other words,

This was no accident.

Jesus was not a victim of circumstances.

This happened according to the plan of God…

That his dearly beloved Son would die in your place,

As your substitute,

To pay your debt,

and take away your sins.

And, he was buried.

Now why this mention of burial?

Have you ever noticed in the Gospels that they all take some effort to describe in detail how Jesus was buried?

Why is that?

Well there are probably several reasons,

But one of the main ones is the obvious,

Burial confirms that one is dead.

This was no coma that Jesus went into that he awoke from in the cool of the tomb.

If you’ve even been with someone near death or even as they die,

You know,

There is nothing quite like it.

Well, Jesus *really* and truly died,

And his burial confirms it.

This is the one side of the Gospel coin.

The other side then is resurrection/appearance.

Is that after three days he rose again,

But what do we actually mean though when we say ‘he was raised’?

Well notice again the other part of the pair -

his appearances, to Peter, The 12, And then more than 500 others,

They confirm his resurrection, And tell you what ‘being raised’ means.

In other words,

being raised doesn’t mean his soul just disappeared up to heaven,

Because he appeared to many.

And being raised doesn’t mean the disciples were just so captivated by who he was that when they remembered him it was *as if* he was still alive,

Because he appeared to many.

And being raised doesn’t mean they had a vision of Jesus,

Because in some of these appearances he ate and drank with them.

So his appearances show us this is a bodily resurrection,

This is a supernatural event,

Where Jesus defeated and overcame death,

Rising to new life in a glorified resurrection body,

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Dear friends,

Left on your own,

Your sins are bad news.

And I *could* give you some good advice about how to deal with your own sins,

But the good news is that Christ has died for those sins.

Left on your own,

Your impending death, is bad news.

And I could give you some good advice on how to live longer,

Diet, exercise, green smoothies, whatever!

But do you know what,

even with the best health advice,

the morality rate is still holding steady at 100%!

And so instead of good advice,

the good news I proclaim to you today,

is that Christ is risen,

He has defeated death,

And so in him you share in this new and everlasting life!

And left on your own,

Your inability to do anything about your own sin and death is bad news too.

And I could give you some good advice about how to try and save yourself,

But instead,

I have good news for you today,

Because Christ died and rose again,

he saves you.

This is the content of the Gospel,

Death for sins and resurrection to new life,

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**OUR RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL**

So then,

What do you do with this Gospel.

What is our response?

Well it’s interesting what’s emphasized in our text.

St Paul says of this Gospel,

It’s that which you simply:

*‘****receive****, and*

*In which you* ***stand****,’*

So what’s the first response here to the Gospel?

It’s simply receiving it,

Which in the context is receiving in faith,

Believing,

Trusting.

That’s just what you do with good news for it to have its impact in your life.

You don’t really do anything with it in the first place,

But you receive it,

You trust in it.

But then having believed,

We ‘stand’ in this Gospel.

Now what is that about?

Well simply put,

to stand,

is the opposite of falling.

So you could say in this picture that there are two basic postures in life,

Standing up on your feet -

secure, established, ready to face the world,

Or falling over -

vulnerable, weak, and defeated.

So what puts you on your feet allows you to stand firm in this life is nothing you do for yourself,

But what God does ***for you*** in Jesus’ death and resurrection.

So that even when it feels like the whole world is crumbling all around you,

The Gospel gives you a solid place to stand.

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I love looking at those photos from the end of world war II,

Where the news came through of the allies victory in different parts of the world.

You may know these photos,

people dancing and celebrating int he streets,

That famous photo of the guy kissing the girl that he apparently had never met,

And so on.

And as I was thinking about the imagery in this text,

one very simple thing occurred to me,

That almost everyone in those photos,

is on their feet,

standing.

The victory was won,

The news of that victory came,

They received it,

And they were on their feet.

Of course there with many challenges and trials still to come,

But they could stand with confidence,

Having received the news of the victory.

Well,

In Christ’s death and resurrection,

The victory has been one,

Over sin, death and the devil.

Let this puts us on our feet,

Let us stand firm in it.

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**CONCLUSION**

We all need to hear some good news now and again.

I sincerely hope in your life you will receive all manner of good news.

But never forget the best news of all,

The good news of first importance.

It’s as you gather in worship with brothers and sisters in Christ,

That You’ve come to a true ‘good news network’.

Where Sunday by Sunday,

the Gospel is proclaimed,

And the crucified and risen Jesus hosts his victory feast.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

In the name of Jesus, Amen.