

GOSPEL and GOOD NEWS

Both the word **gospel** and the Greek term *evangelion* mean *good news*. In the early church *good news* referred either to Jesus' *own* preaching or to preaching *about* Jesus. Matthew, for example, speaks of Jesus proclaiming the good news of the kingdom (4:23). Paul, on the other hand, speaks of the gospel which *he and other apostles* preach, the good news of what God has done to save us through Jesus (cf. Rom 1:16; 15:19; I Cor. 15:1-2). Paul refers to the message he proclaims *about* Jesus Christ and especially *about* Christ's death and resurrection. Only later, in the second century of the Christian era, did *gospel* become a designation for a literary document about Jesus, such as the Gospel According to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The author of Mark probably contributed to this development by the use of *evangelion* to describe his subject matter in the opening line of his work (Mark 1:1):¹ (Richard B. Gardner, *Believers Church Bible Commentary on MATTHEW*)

In Luke 4:18, *Good News to the Poor* means releasing, letting go, forgiving, restoring, images of messianic hope. This is what the Messiah, the Anointed One, is all about. Using Is. 61:1-2, first, Jesus reveals *he* is the Messiah. Second, his role is to bring liberating news to the poor, the blind, the slaves, and the oppressed. Third, this is the proclamation of God's favorable year. Then Jesus concludes with dynamite: "*Today* this Scripture has been fulfilled in *your* hearing. The messianic announcement is alive today in your presence. You are the witness to it. I am much more than Joseph's little boy, *I am the Messiah!*"² (Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom*)

Is. 61:1-3 indicates a "reversal." "Reversal" is that those who have been conditioned to expect bad news to continue are now promised good news. Things are going to change. "The brokenhearted," instead of being further pummeled by life, will have their wounds bound up; they will be healed. The "captives," instead of being still more tightly constricted, will be liberated. The "prisoners," instead of being denied parole, or having their sentences further extended, will discover that the prison doors are open, and they are free.³ For Luke, the poor is first of all are persons without economic resources. They are the ones given good news and hope."⁴ (Robert McAfee Brown, *Reclaiming the Bible*)

The literal meaning of Jubilee was certainly good news in Nazareth. The poor could say good-bye to their debts. Those driven into slavery because of debts could now come home. Peasants forced to sell land would see it returned once again to their family. No question about it, this was *very* good news! Listeners in the synagogue would have heard him saying, "The Messiah is *here!* Salvation is dawning. The Kingdom of God is *near*. God's presence has broken in among you *now*."⁵ (Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom*)

One understands Jesus' relationship to the Jubilee that he was concerned about the economically poor and that he had harsh words for the rich. He urged followers to give to beggars, to lend without expecting repayment, and to give alms without expecting reward. He spoke of the impossibility of serving both God and mammon, and warned against laying up treasurers on earth. The "Jerusalem church," composed of Jesus' immediate followers and early converts, apparently practiced a form of common ownership.⁶ (Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision*)

[Jesus is good news to us] because he is an epiphany of God. He did not revealed God only his teaching but in his very way of being. The epiphany was *Jesus* – his "person" as well as his message. As such, he was an "image of God. What he was like therefore discloses what God is like. In

¹ Richard B. Gardner, *Believers Church Bible Commentary on MATTHEW* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991), 421.

² Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003), 85.

³ Robert McAfee Brown, *Reclaiming the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 34-35.

⁴ Robert McAfee Brown, *Reclaiming the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 69

⁵ Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2003), 93.

⁶ Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision* (New York: Harper Collins, 1987), 137.

traditional language, He was the love of God incarnate. The particular quality of that love is seen in the compassion which we see in the historical Jesus. It is the compassion which moved him to touch lepers, to heal on the Sabbath, to see in the ostracized members of the human community “children of God,” and to risk his life for the sake of saving his people.⁷ (Marcus J. Borg. *Jesus: A New Vision*)

There is a social dimension as well as an individual dimension to the compassion of God as we see in Jesus. For him, the divine compassion included grief and anger about the blindness, injustice, and idolatry that caused human suffering. Jesus is also a model for the Christian life with the image of **discipleship**. To be a disciple meant “to follow after.” whoever would be my disciple, Jesus said, “Let him *follow me*.” To be a follower of Jesus means to take seriously what he took seriously, to be *like him* in some sense. It is what St. Paul meant when he said, “Be imitators of Christ.” It has three core elements. First, its *source* is a “birth” in the Spirit. The birth involves that “dying to self” of which Jesus spoke and which he himself experienced: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Bonhoeffer’s epigram caught its meaning: “When Christ calls a man he bids him come and die.” The death leads to a new life, a rebirth out of the world of conventional wisdom and the preoccupation with the self and its securities which it sustains, to a new way of being. Being “born of the Spirit” creates a radically new identity, one no longer conferred by culture.

The second core element of life in the Spirit is compassion which is both a feeling and a way of being. One *feels* compassion *is* compassionate. Not simply a feeling of benevolent goodwill, but a *feeling with* others and a capacity to be *moved* by their situation. As a feeling, it becomes a motive for deeds. Compassion is a grace, not an achievement. It depends upon the relationship to the Spirit which we see in Jesus; empty of self, one can be filled with the Spirit of God the compassionate one.⁸ (Marcus J. Borg. *Jesus: A New Vision*)

The third core element of life in the Spirit is a dialectical *relationship to culture*. As the movement to a life grounded in the Spirit of God, it is a movement away from the many securities offered by culture, whether goods, status, identity, nation, success, or righteousness. The vision of life lived and taught by Jesus means, as it did for the first disciples, leaving the “home” of conventional wisdom, whether religious or secular.⁹ (Marcus J. Borg. *Jesus: A New Vision*)

As journeying with Jesus, discipleship means being on the road with him. It means to be an itinerant, a sojourner; to have nowhere to lay one’s head, no permanent resting place. Discipleship means eating at his table and experiencing his banquet. That banquet is an inclusive banquet, including those we tend to exclude. Journeying with Jesus also means to become part of the alternative community of Jesus. Discipleship is not an individual path, but a journey in a company of disciples. It is the road less traveled, yet discipleship involves being in a community that remembers and celebrates Jesus. It is the primary role of the church. Discipleship involves becoming compassionate. “Be compassionate as God is compassionate” is the defining mark of the follower of Jesus. Compassion is the fruit of life in the Spirit and the ethos of the community of Jesus. It is a journey of transformation. It is an image of Christian life not primarily as believing or being good but as a relationship with God. That relationship does not leave us unchanged but transform us into more and more compassionate beings, “into the likeness of Christ.”¹⁰ (Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*)

⁷ Marcus J. Borg. *Jesus: A New Vision* (New York: Harper Collins, 1987), 192.

⁸ Marcus J. Borg. *Jesus: A New Vision* (New York: Harper Collins, 1987), 193.

⁹ Marcus J. Borg. *Jesus: A New Vision* (New York: Harper Collins, 1987), 194

¹⁰ Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995), 135-136.

KINGDOM OF GOD

Misconception of the kingdom have been all too common in every age of the church.

1) Some have equated the kingdom with the institution of the church or with a theocratic state in which the saints hold the power. 2) Others have viewed the kingdom as a wholly future reality, whether in terms of a millennial reign or in terms of a heavenly realm. 3) Still others have spiritualized the image of the kingdom, restricting its meaning to an inward reign in the heart. 4) Finally, there are those who speak of Christians *building* the kingdom, losing sight of the fact that God's reign is God's doing. 5) While each of these views contains an element of truth, each distorts the NT message.

In her book, "In Memory of Her," Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza said that Jesus claimed the *basileia* [Kingdom of God] for *three* distinct groups of people: (1) the destitute poor; (2) the sick and crippled; and (3) tax collectors, sinners, and prostitutes. The oldest traditions elaborate concretely Jesus' reply to John that 'the poor have good news preached to them.' Those who are dying of starvation and are desperate because they see no way out of their poverty into the future are promised the *basileia*. The promise of the *basileia* to the beggared and destitute affirms that God will make their cause God's own concern. God is on their side against all those who trample down their rights. Since Yahweh is the owner of the land and has given it into the care of *all* the people, the poor of Israel are cheated out of their rightful inheritance. Therefore, the prophets never tired of announcing that God is on the side of the poor and will take up their cause (Deut 15:7-18; Amos 2:6-8). The salvation of the *basileia* is not confined to the soul but spells wholeness for the total person in her/his social relations. ¹¹ (Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*)

Moltmann also claims that "the gospel of the kingdom of God is proclaimed to "the poor:" It assured the future of the kingdom of God that begins among the people who suffer most from acts of violence and injustice. The gospel assures the poor of God's life-giving, newly creating activity. The gospel is realistic, not idealistic. It does not bring new teaching; it brings a new reality. That is why what is most important for Jesus is his quarrel with poverty, sickness, and demonism and forsakenness, not his quarrel with the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. . . . It brings them *a new dignity*. The poor, the slaves and the prostitute are no longer the passive objects of oppression and humiliation; they are now their own conscious subjects, with all the dignity of God's first children. With this assurance and awareness, the poor, slaves and prostitutes can get up out of the dust and help themselves. They no longer adopt the system of values of their exploiters, according to which it is only the rich who are real persons. The inward acceptance by the poor themselves of the values of the rich is a severe obstacle to their self-liberation. It made poverty self-destructive, and produces self-hate in the poor themselves. The gospel about the kingdom of God which belongs to the poor, vanquishes their self-hatred, and gives the poor courage, so that they can live with "their heads held high" and can "walk erect." The poor becomes God's children in this world of violence and injustice. The kingdom of God becomes "the messianic kingdom of the poor."¹² (Moltmann, *The Way*)

Mark 1:15 says, "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.*" Jesus' coming marks the arrival of God's kingdom. God's dynamic reign. His mighty works are the works of God. His authoritative teaching interprets God's ways. Jesus breaks through barriers of religion, piety, tradition, and ethnicity to bring God's good news to those formerly excluded. Those with eyes to see, discern that in all Jesus does, the secret kingdom is being established. God's reign is being established as Jesus proclaims, interprets, and enacts God's secret kingdom. Accepting God's reign by following this Messiah means self-sacrifice, servanthood, humility, standing with the weak, and rejecting the power-hungry and glory-seeking ways of the world. It means allegiance to a Messiah who will suffer and die. It means living by the values of the coming kingdom, where God's thoughts, not human thoughts, determine what is right. After three days, the crucified one becomes the resurrected one. Jesus offers new beginnings to those who have failed him; they are

¹¹ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 122-123.

¹² Moltmann, *The Way*, 99, 101.

invited back to a life of faithful discipleship and mission. Provocative resurrection message offers second chances to disciples who have failed to follow and who are afraid to proclaim the good news. Authentic discipleship involves following Jesus on the way of the cross.¹³ (Timothy J. Geddert, in his *Believers Church Bible Commentary on Mark*)

All four gospel writers represent some form of the paradoxical already/not yet kingdom. Jesus represents that view. NT clearly portrays the kingdom as something God establishes. Jesus' followers participate in it, they proclaim it, they do its work. Jesus' way is the way of selfless serving, bold proclamation, and willingness to suffer for truth and righteousness. Those who experience the kingdom that Jesus announced must choose the way Jesus chose. In Mark, that choice is called repenting and believing the good news (1: 15).¹⁴ (Timothy J. Geddert. *Believers Church Bible Commentary on Mark*).

Jesus urged people to turn from their existing oppressive system and come into the Kingdom of God, a new home. "Repent" and "repentance" are often closely linked to "sinners" and "forgiveness" in Luke, (Greek *aphesis*), and have a wide range of meaning: freeing bonded slaves, cancellation of monetary debts, eschatological liberation, and forgiveness of an individual sins.¹⁵ (Maynard-Reid, *Evangelism*)

Kraybill argues that conversion, which doesn't involve economic change, isn't complete conversion. Jesus not only condemns greed in first-century Palestine; he calls for a perpetual Jubilee.¹⁶ (Kraybill, *Upside-Down*)

The power of God's *basileia* is realized in Jesus' table community with the poor, the sinners, the tax collectors, and prostitutes-with all those who do not belong to the 'holy people,' who are somehow deficient in the eyes of the righteous.¹⁷

Jesus proclaimed *the kingdom of God* to the poor and bestowed *the power of God* on the sick; and in the same way he brought sinners and tax collectors *the justice of God*, which is the justice of grace. He demonstrated this publicly by sitting down at table with them. In the eschatological context of his own message, this shared meal is an anticipation of the eating and drinking of the righteous in the kingdom of God."¹⁸ The gospel has two faces: Jesus proclaims to the poor the kingdom of God without any conditions, and calls them blessed because the kingdom is already theirs. But the gospel of kingdom meets the rich with the *call to conversion*. (Mark 1:15) Conversion means turning round, the turn from violence to justice, from isolation to community, from death to life¹⁹ (Moltmann, *The Way*)

¹³ Timothy J. Geddert. *Believers Church Bible Commentary on Mark* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 23-24.

¹⁴ Timothy J. Geddert. *Believers Church Bible Commentary on Mark* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 42-43.

¹⁵ Maynard-Reid, *Evangelism*, 109.

¹⁶ Kraybill, *Upside-Down*, 118.

¹⁷ Schussler Fiorenza, *Memory*, 120-121.

¹⁸ Moltmann, *The Way*, 112.

¹⁹ Moltmann, *The Way*, 102.

NEIGHBOR

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who resisted Hitler in Germany during World War II, wrote, "Neighborliness is not a quality in other people, it is simply their claim on ourselves." God's love for us transforms our economic behavior. Loving God with all our heart means loving our neighbors as much as ourselves. And this means caring, sharing, giving—valuing our neighbor's welfare as much as our own. Care for our neighbor strips the old demons of their grip. Jesus invites us to treat the poor as our neighbor as our self."²⁰ (Kraybill, *Upside-Down Kingdom*)

Calvin explains that "neighbors" are not only relatives and friends but even persons unknown to us and enemies. They are certainly joined by that bond by which God gathers the whole human race at once. "People are not born for themselves alone, but the whole human race is interconnected, linked together with a holy bond."²¹

Calvin reminds the rich that what they possess has been given them in trust for their needs and the needs of others; they will be held accountable for their stewardship. Commenting on 2 Cor. 8:13-17, where Paul urges the Corinthians to share their abundance with those in want, so that there may be "equality," Calvin does not think this means mathematical equality; rather, it means the sharing of the members of the church "in proportion to their gifts and needs," since all that they have comes from God. Calvin reminds his readers: "We are not our own. We are God's. We seek not the things that are ours but those which are of the Lord's will and will serve to advance his glory. This perspective frees Christians to be self-forgetful and open to the neighbor's need. Those who give should not merely be cheerful but "put themselves in the place of the one whom they see in need of their assistance, and pity the person's ill fortune as if they themselves experienced and bore it," without any concern for the gratitude from receiver. The only limit which should be set in kindness to those in need is the end of one's resources; that is the limit set by the rule of love."²²

Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda would claim that biblical "neighbor-love" implies active commitment to the well-being of who or what is loved. Next, where systemic injustice causes suffering, seeking the well-being or good of those who suffer entails challenging that injustice. The challenge includes seeing systemic evil for what it is and acknowledging it, resisting it, and pioneering more just alternatives. According to Luther, neighbor-love has at least three dimensions: 1) Love manifest in service to neighbor, even if it may bring great danger to self and family; 2) love manifest in disclosing and theologically denouncing oppression or exploitation of those who are vulnerable, where it is perceived; and 3) love manifest in ways of living that counter prevailing cultural norms where those norms exploit the vulnerable or defy God in some other way. Loving in these forms, "we become hands and feet of Christ, for the healing of the world."²³ (Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, *Public Church*)

McAfee Brown would say that in Good Samaritan story, the neighbor was not the wounded man. The neighbor was the Samaritan who *approached* the wounded man and *made him his neighbor*. He enters into the wounded man's situation. Not just any man but *a man who had suffered injustice and violence* and needed help from someone who was able to have com-*passion* on him.²⁴ (Robert McAfee Brown, *Unexpected News*)

According to Maynard-Reid, "Who is my neighbor" was more significant than the rich lawyer realized. Another way to ask is, "Where do I live?" or "Where do I find life?" or "Where is my heart?" Jesus is saying that if the wealthy of his day intend to enter God's reign, they have to give up their wealth which they have gained selfishly and oppressively. They must share possessions with the less fortunate to fulfill in part their hope of sharing in the riches of the reign of God. This ruler can't

²⁰ Kraybill, *Upside-Down Kingdom*, 130.

²¹ Jane Dempsey Douglas, *Women Freedom & Calvin* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 114.

²² Jane Dempsey Douglas, *Women Freedom & Calvin* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 117.

²³ Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, *Public Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 23-24.

²⁴ Robert McAfee Brown, *Unexpected News*, 111-112.

receive eternal life because he rejects Jesus' call. We cannot overstress the role of *sharing* in Luke's missiology. Challenging the rich to share is part of the good news to the poor."²⁵ (Maynard-Reid, *Evangelism*)

According to Boice, every sufferer whom we can assist has a claim of neighbor-love upon us which we cannot repudiate without injuring him and dishonoring God. The second thing that might have hindered the Samaritan's show of love for the sufferer was *nationality or religion*. Jesus might have wanted to stress in particular that the only one who stopped to help the disabled was a Samaritan. The Jews hated the Samaritans and could not speak civilly of them. The outcast had acted as a neighbor though he had ample cause not to care, hated as he was, whereas the Jewish priest and Levite would not show mercy even to one of their own nationality. Christ's point is that love must transcend nationality, race and religion.²⁶

Wesley concurs: "The salvation offered in our gospel came with not *pre*-conditions, but *post* conditions."²⁷ It is only our feeding the hungry, our giving drink to the thirsty, our receiving the stranger our clothing the naked, our caring for the sick, and our visiting the prisoners that shows us truly to be Christ's disciples. Those things do not make us disciples, but their absence shows that we are not.²⁸

Watson notes, "The good news of salvation is not merely for persons, but for institutions, for systems, and for cities and nations. The healing that comes from God in Christ is for every dimension of humanity, and this will not come by individual conversions alone. The prophets, including Jesus of Nazareth, called on cities and nations to repent as well as persons. (Amos 5:14-17; Jonah 3:1-10; Micah 4:1-9; Matt. 11:20-24)²⁹

Jesus is among the homeless guests. In Matt. 25: 35-36, 40, 42-43, 45, Jesus says that when we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick, visit the imprisoned and welcome the homeless we have done these acts for Jesus himself, and when don't do it for them we haven't don't it for Jesus himself. (25: 31-46) Therefore, Jesus seems to identify with them; he is among the homeless guests. In Jesus Christ, God comes to dwell among us as guest; as a homeless baby; as an adult with no place to lay his head; as a convict, abandoned and scorned by others. He epitomizes the needy stranger, dependent on the hospitality of others. He asks for hospitality from a Samaritan woman (John 4) and a rich tax collector (Luke 19) and receives it gladly from many others.³⁰

²⁵ Maynard-Reid, *Evangelism*, 86.

²⁶ Boice, *The Parables*, 152- 153.

²⁷ Watson, *Proclaiming Christ*, 124.

²⁸ Boice, *Parable*, 154.

²⁹ Watson, *Proclaiming Christ*, 126.

³⁰ Amy Plantinga Pauw, "Jesus Christ as Host and Guest," in *Renewing the Vision*, ed. Cynthia M. Campbell (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2000), 14.

WHAT SHALL WE DO?

- President and federal government cannot do it alone. Every citizen, the church and government must work together to defeat the monster of homelessness. I would like to remind us of our old overture 98-55 of 1998 which was adopted by 1998 GA: “Every Church Open One Room” submitted by Seattle Presbytery.
- Move one step forward toward permanent solution toward - ending homelessness.
- Include homeless issue in pastoral prayer, bible study, sermon and minute for mission on Sundays.
- Encourage your Presbytery to form a Homeless Network and educate congregations.
- Encourage your congregation to join the Presbytery Network if you have one or join the National Presbyterian Network to End Homelessness to share information and partner with: Contact: Sandy Champion 301-602-1620 (cell) tsachamp@starpower.net.
- Encourage your congregation to hold a special homeless seminar and/or Homeless Mission Fair Sunday by inviting a guest speaker to address the issue. Keep Homeless Sunday of PC (USA) in August using the minute for mission in the Mission Year Book of each year.
- Encourage your Presbytery to offer a pre-Presbytery seminar on Homelessness.
- Cook community meals for local poor / homeless people in partnership with other congregations.
- Your congregation may open a room to be a shelter site in partnership with other churches and local homeless programs.
- Open your church parking lot to host a tent-city in partnership with local tent city mission.
- Identify apartment owners or mother-in-law apartment in your congregation and encourage them to rent units to homeless people in partnership with local housing programs.
- In the Synod of Alaska Northwest, five presbyteries organized Presbytery-wide Homeless Network and encourage member churches to do the followings:
 - Encourage your church to rent an apartment for the homeless in partnership with shelters in your neighborhood or city. EX: Nest Mission of Korean-American Churches in Washington State started rental assistance program in partnership with local shelters and health care organizations. It also offers community meal every Sunday evening and distribute emergency items such as bus tickets, shower tickets, socks, toiletries, and underwear (Model: WA State Nest Mission: Contact: Jean Kim (425) 712-1677 E-mail: jeankimhome@verizon.net)
 - Plymouth Housing Group in Seattle works to eliminate homelessness and stabilize homeless and very low-income people in housing by preserving, developing and operating safe, decent affordable housing. Since 2004, Plymouth Housing Group has created nearly 400 units of permanent supportive housing for homeless and very low-income people in Seattle. For detail contact: chollinger@plymouthhousing.org.

In the U.S. history, the time people shared the most was the depression period of 1930s. Bill Gates said, “*It is now even more important for those with more to help those with less.*”

Our good Lord promises, “*Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and will be repaid in full*” (Prov. 19:17). “*Whoever gives to the poor will lack nothing*” (Prov. 28: 27). “*Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.*” (Luke. 6: 38).