

**Hear The Good News... January 23, 2022 - Kirkwall Presbyterian Church**  
**The Rev. Monika Berezki-Farkas**

Bible Readings: Nehemiah 8:1-10 and Luke 4:4-21

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Psalm 19: 14

Dear Friends!

How many of you know the story of Little Red Riding Hood? It's about a girl who delivered food to her grandma, and had to go through the woods where the big bad wolf lived. He wanted to eat the girl and the food in her basket, but before that he went into the grandma's house and ate the grandma. Then the wolf pretended that he was the grandma and when the girl arrived he ate her too. Then he went to sleep.

Can you imagine that this tale has two versions? In one of them this is the end, when the wolf ate the girl and went to sleep. But in the other one, a hunter came to the girl and grandma's help and he cut them out of the wolf's tummy. They were saved.

Which story do you like? The one with the ending where the wolf fell asleep with the girl and grandma in his tummy or the one where they were saved? I prefer the second one. I like the happy ending, at least for the girl and grandma.

Somehow we prefer stories with happy endings. How many times do we have good and bad news to share or we hear them one after the other. But which do you think is better to hear first? Many people choose to hear the bad news first, then the good news.

But researchers noticed that if people have to deliver the news they often start with the good, like sugar coating the bad news just to be sure it will be easier for others to swallow. And this is a bad tactic. Because somehow we all prefer the endings that can raise us up from the dust. Just think about the stories with happy endings. We all hope for a happy ending. Who likes the stories where there is no happy ending?

But friends, if I look at the two big stories from Nehemiah and Luke, all I can see is good news. First, let's see the story of Nehemiah, who was a Jewish man in exile in Persia, where he was the cupbearer to the king. This job meant that he had to taste every drink before the king. One day Nehemiah got bad news about Jerusalem, that the walls and the temple were in terrible shape. He was sad in his heart because of his homeland and the temple. What he did with this news is so amazing to me. He went to God and prayed and fasted. His prayer to

God is so beautiful. It starts with telling God how amazing he was. It's not about all the troubles. First, Nehemiah reminded himself that now he is talking to God.

Then after that Nehemiah told God his request. And God listened to him. He wanted to have a favour from the king and he got it. The king saw how sad he was and helped him to go home and be a governor in Judah. Nehemiah went to Jerusalem and started to build up the walls. Some people were against him, and didn't want him to be successful, but he started this work with prayers. He was with God and in a short time, he was able to find favour in the people's eyes and they helped him to rebuild the walls.

When the walls were done the people gathered together and Ezra read the Bible to them and they realized how far they lived from God. They were sad in their hearts but this is not the end of the story, but what Nehemiah said to them: Don't grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength

And oh how our Lord knows that we need good news! Look at the New Testament story when Jesus went back to Nazareth, his home town and on a Sabbath day he went to the synagogue, the meeting place for the Jews. What we see here is that Jesus had a practice of going to church. We hear from everywhere that God can be worshipped anywhere, especially when churches had to close because of the pandemic. It became a saying: the church is not the building, the church is the people. And while it can be true, look at Jesus who was one with God and how important it was for him to go to church. And if it was important for Jesus to go to church as a practice, we should follow him too.

What he did there tells us that he was accepted as a teacher, since he stood up to read and he got a scroll. He read it then sat down. And usually, teachers did that. They stood up for reading and sat down for teaching. And passage Jesus read was from the book of Isaiah 61:1-2:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

Look at this. Jesus didn't ask which news we want to hear first, he starts with the good news because he is the good news. And He knows what this good news means to others. He came to proclaim good news for the poor, freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, freedom for the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Then He stopped reading. Do you know why? Because then the bad news was coming in the book of Isaiah: to proclaim the day of vengeance of our God. And Jesus didn't bring bad news, he didn't even read the bad news. He brought good news to us all.

Then he sat down and said to those people: Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

What these words mean is that all that Jesus said was the truth. He is anointed by God to bring good news, freedom, and recovery of sight.

Have you ever had a feeling when you heard something that it's too good to be true?

Honestly, it's good to hear the message from Jesus. It's good to hear that he brought the good news, freedom and all the good things, but how we live is not about the excitement we feel about this passage. As soon as we leave the sanctuary, we are going back to the good news/bad news mentality: there has to be bad news, this is too good to hear, it cannot be all true. How many of you believe 100% in this news, that we are saved, freed by Jesus? That with Jesus it is impossible to fail? What Jesus says is the truth and it means that I have to move. It means actions from my side too. It means more than listening on Sundays. Jesus calls us to action. And actions come with uncomfortable questions too.

- Good news to the poor. Who are the poor? Let's think of the Beatitudes, blessed are the poor in spirit...

When we see how far we are from God and we are sad and poor in spirit at that moment, we will know how we need God. That we don't need anything else in this world, only God. And there is good news to the poor: God with us. And if we are the followers of Christ we should take Christ as the good news everywhere. Oh, how many times we are not carriers of the good news.

- Freedom for prisoners means more than actual jails with prisoners. Have you ever thought that you are in prison because of your sin? Hear the good news, there is freedom in Jesus. But oh how many times with our actions and words we put people in jail. But with Jesus, our words and actions will also bring freedom to all that is around us.

- Recovery of sight for the blind. Yes, it can be about physical blindness, but when we know Jesus we know it's more about moral and spiritual blindness. Just think about the stories in the gospels with the Pharisees. How they were too blind to see Jesus as the son of God. How blind we are when we only believe in these stories on Sunday mornings but during the week we forget about all the promises and prophecies Jesus fulfilled. May Jesus give us sight.

- Freedom to the oppressed. Many times we think that's wonderful news for us because we are oppressed by others. In one of my doctoral papers, I wrote about the oppressed and oppressors. How many times oppressors didn't even notice what they were doing. Is there anybody who is oppressed by me? Is there anybody who lives within poor circumstances while I have everything, or even more than I need? Maybe I should listen to Jesus and sell everything I have and give it to the poor?

If everything that Jesus said is true, are we in big trouble? Who can do all the things Jesus wants us to do? We are not perfect. But do you think Jesus doesn't know us? That's why he stopped reading and didn't say anything about punishment or the day of judgement that day in the synagogue. Now first he wants you to know about the good news. Let Jesus be your good news and let him change you. Amen