

Good News, Bad News

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church
January 23, 2022
by Rev. Dave Le Grand

A teenager, let's call her Jennifer, arrives home, and yells to her mother while heading up the stairs, "I have good news and bad news."

Mom replies, "Give me the good news first."

"Well, mom, the airbags work really well in your car."

I was going to tell you more, but I'll quite while I'm behind.

So, we all want to make our world better, right? Of course we do. But then, hypothetically, a friend might press me on that a bit, suggesting that the struggle of so many in my world might be directly related to the comforts and privileges that I enjoy. What *then* would be my reaction?

It might rattle me a bit. Sure, I might react, defensively; such a suggestion is simplistic, or Marxist. "It's dumb and I want you to leave!"

A bit too reactive? So, what if that friend manages to stay, pressing further; saying that the core assertion of the Old Testament prophets and of Jesus as we find him in the Gospel of Luke, the core of prophetic writings is turning power and privilege on its head.

Once I stop being defensive, and I really dig into Luke, I realize that Jesus in today's passage is picking up the cry of the prophets, his ancestors. Jesus is claiming this ancient prophetic tradition that speaks truth to those who claim to be faithful, yet who are not being righteous. Prophets emerge in times and places where there is a breakdown of shalom, of right relationships – those with power and privilege are out of relationship with those who are most vulnerable, and therefore treating them as less than the beloved of God.

I had a very personal experience of this disconnect. When the horrific terrorist attacks killed over 3,000 civilians in the United States in 2001, I happened to be working in a youth shelter – where homeless, often addicted, forgotten youth stayed. I remember watching the old TV set, surreal images of planes weaponized to destroy.

I felt numb. I didn't know what to say or do. In contrast, it seemed, the young people – vulnerable, their hope and self-esteem in tatters – they cheered wildly, and angrily. I confess that I felt stunned, doubly traumatized; haunted by those images and the reality unfolding, but also listening to people *celebrating* this tragedy. After some deep

Just as a body,
though one,
has many parts,
but all its many parts
form one body,
so it is with Christ.
For we were all baptized by one Spirit
so as to form one body
—whether Jews or Gentiles,
slave or free
—and we were all given
the one Spirit to drink.
Even so the body is not
made up of one part
but of many.

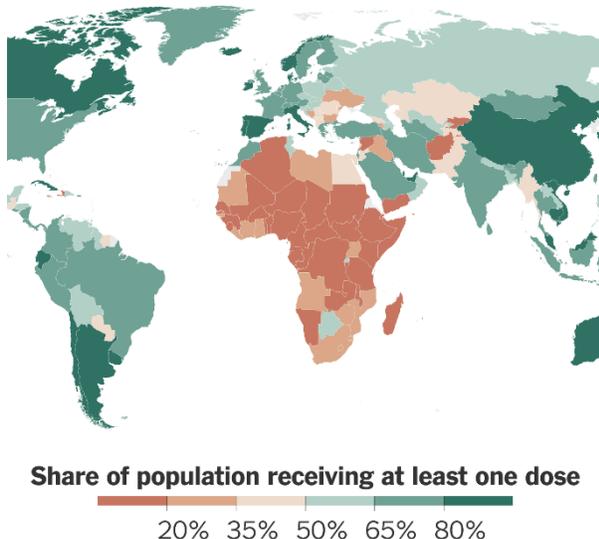
1 Corinthians 12:12-14



reflection, I recognized a disconnect; my privilege and comfort were out of touch with so many in that room. These, as so many, young people felt forgotten, victimized.

I may not at all agree with the analysis of those youth, but I came to understand that these young people probably interpreted that picture of those buildings reduced to rubble as the mighty being brought low. Extremist views may not be directly caused by injustice and inequity, but it certainly is fuelled by disconnect that allows those with privilege to ignore those barely able to survive.

There is most definitely disparity in our community, our world. We may not cause the injustice, but do we challenge the system?



I am looking forward to getting my booster shot next week, yet at the same time, I can't get out of my head reports that I've heard on CBC that haunt me; many in the world have not been able to get one vaccination.

To put a figure to that, the New York Times offers an interactive map showing who has, and who has not gotten a shot. 62% of the world population has had at least one dose.¹ Of course, I can say that it is not that simple. Some people have been informed and rejected vaccination. But we know, don't we, that this is a glaring symbol of inequity. The Good News, if we choose to

insulate ourselves from the world, could be that we are protected. The Bad News then, is that there are legions of disaffected people in our world.

Since ancient times, there have been prophets, warning of inequity, of God's day of reckoning coming when the mighty will be brought low, and the lowly raised. Remember again young Mary proclaiming radical revolution is coming in earlier in this Gospel of Luke – her child a sign of God's coming to make things right.

This vision of God's day sounds revolutionary; righting of wrongs, the mighty brought low, proclaimed by Hebrew prophets, and young Mary, and now proclaimed by Jesus at his childhood synagogue. At first it must have been a source of pride and joy for those listeners, some of them people who enjoy comfort. They were likely people with some economic privilege and status, people who throw a tiny coin – the mite – to the leper on the street. But, they also most likely avoided the man at the edge of town with mental health issues screaming, but no one listening. It might suddenly dawn on those elders of Jesus, that day, that this is Good News for those who presently have little, but if this revolutionary redistribution by God, the righting of wrongs, might result in giving up of privilege.

Am I one of that number? Are you?

¹ New York Times, as of Jan 22, 2022 <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/world/covid-vaccinations-tracker.html>

Now ok, it sounds like Bad News; this may sound like Bad News, and it does, at first hearing. But here is the thing – this Bible tradition of prophets, calling people in power to seek right relations, is about destroying disparity between people, and breaking down systems of apathy, where people tend to say, “that’s just the way the world works.”

To be a faithful Jew in the Hebrew Scriptures was to heed the prophet’s words – God’s Day – Jesus of the Gospels reinterpreted it as God’s kin(g)dom or Realm. Whatever you call it, this vision of God’s has economic and political implications.

At the heart of it, and Jesus preached this time and again, the kin-dom vision proclaims right-ness: righting relationships, righting wrongs, righting communities. For the poor, the put down, the ostracized – this IS Great News. For those who stand to lose power or authority, maybe that too is Good News, for those of us with privilege and comfort.



The privileged, the comfortable who feel the disconnect, are invited by Jesus to find new ways to connect with those who are hungry, in prison, thirsty, afraid and alone.

Wonderful are you who give to causes that support the vulnerable, but even more blessed are you who seek to understand the experience of one person you encounter on your daily journey (whether physically or virtually) who seems on the fringes of community.

That message of Jesus speaks directly to my heart, I’ll admit, as I, privileged, walk past that park, beside this building. feeling disconnected, feeling the injustice, needing to right the wrong. How? How do you and I truly speak and act for right relations? That feels like Bad News. The Good News is that *I am, we are*, called by Christ, by God, out of our comfort zones; called to break down barriers that separate us from our world – personally and systemically. Re-connecting the people of privilege with the majority world population where many barely survive.

Jesus reminds us that God’s call to righteousness, to right relationships, is as ancient as the oldest sacred texts. It feels political, economic, but at its heart it is spiritual. At first what seems Bad News might just turn into Good News if you prayerfully consider for yourself what wrongs you can begin righting, one relationship at a time. Amen.