

*... May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing and of you, who are ROCK, REDEEMER, and COMFORTER of us all. Amen.*

Have you been the bearer of news... good news... not so good news?

As news of the coronavirus deaths and economic collapse enveloped our country this spring, celebrity comedian John Krasinsky started a web-series called, “Some Good News.” The feel good show has millions of viewers and was quickly picked up by network television. It feels good to hear good news during hard times. Right? Sometimes!

Sometimes good news can be hard to receive. Think about a time when you were struggling and needed validation but instead someone pointed out the silver lining. Or think about the stories that make us feel good but also highlight the gross inequalities in America—some people are so rich they can pay an entire class’ student debt or an entire building’s rent.

The good news in the book of Isaiah is richer and deeper than any of these things. The author is talking about the restoration of God’s people: deep and lasting peace, reconciliation, salvation. As we have seen through sermons this year, the contemplative life unravels us and stretches us. That is not comfortable. People will need some good news. What is the deep and abiding good news for us today? How might we become an instrument of the Good News?

Friends, the scripture today is a reminder that you... and I... have a mission as followers of Christ.

Remember, the contemplative way of life is not simply adding on meditation or prayer practices to our beliefs about God. It is a journey, an active participation in practices that cultivates our connection and beliefs about God so we might go deeper in relationship with the Divine Beloved.

We’ve looked at growing deep roots, soaking in the warmth of God’s love, focusing on resiliency in difficult times, and the beauty of WOW in the mystery of unknowing. Last week we savored beauty in ourselves and those we meet.

Today we are charged with action... Becoming the instruments of the Good News! The messengers...the bearers of light, love, and hope.

A contemplative way of life concerns what we think and what we do. But it is more fundamentally how we are disposed toward reality. In this series have discussed how we are made for the Beloved and created with a capacity to recognize the profound beauty of all of creation. This is our essential nature, our inheritance and destiny. As Dr. Farley states, ‘ the great paradox of human life is how alienated we are from this nature and how difficult it is to recover intimacy with the Beloved. It is difficult to love creation with abandoned joy and searing compassion’.

When we realize something other than ourselves is really real, that it suffers like we do and sings out its name like we do, compassion and justice naturally arise. Simone Weil puts it this way: “The poet produces beauty by fixing his [sic] attention on something real. The act of love is produced in the same way. To know that this man, who is cold and hungry, really exists as much as I do myself, and is really cold and hungry -that is enough. The rest follows of itself.”<sup>1</sup>

Each of us will be more alive to some kinds of suffering than others. We will be called into consolation and resistance in ways appropriate to our abilities and circumstances. As one of the mystical fathers of the civil rights movement, Howard Thurman, put it, “Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”<sup>2</sup> Courageous and compassionate beauty will awaken us to the world’s needs, but our unique vitality will guide us to the work best fitting to us. This is passion... this is calling.

Many listening today are aware of the opportunity I had to travel to India in early 2013. I traveled with a Seminary group and we were there to learn about non-government/non-profit organizations that were making a difference in the lives of the poor and marginalized. We also connected with Seminary students at Bishop’s College in Kolkata. We experienced worship in many locations and with several non-Christian faith traditions. We also accompanied our Seminarian to

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<sup>1</sup> Simone Weil, *The Notebooks of Simone Weil*, trans. Arthur Wills, Routledge (New York: Routledge, 2004), 449

<sup>2</sup> Howard Thurman quoted in Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: Crossroads, 1997)

their Church site. I was invited to preach the message that day, and had 10 minutes notice to prepare while riding to church in the taxi.

At the end of service, the pastor and I stood together to greet the congregation. One gentleman came by in turn, knelt down in front of me and began praying over my feet. It was quite a humbling moment.

As I reflected on that moment, this scripture passage came to mind. For this man, the message was inspirational and moved him to this act of respect. For me, it was a moment of affirmation... that my calling to serve God and God's people as an instrument of the Good News was true, real and of God.

On Thursday during morning Bible study, I was once again reminded of how we become messengers and instruments of the Good News as we dive deep into God's word and cultivate resonance with God's will and way.

We have been reading 'Be the Bridge' by Latasha Morrison. The final chapter asks us to remember how we are called to build relations with our family, friends, and church family, and share the good news that God desires re-connection among all tribes and tongues, people and nations (Rev 5:9), in other words, our neighbors and communities. Out of our conversations, members of our study group voiced a call to be active in learning more and engaging in conversations with nearby churches and neighbors in the future.

Another member of the study group has responded to a nudge and a need for leading another bible study group on Monday evenings! This will meet a need for those who work during the day. Another Instrument of the Good News.

This is our challenge in these days, friends. To see one another as sacred, as loved by God, just as we are to know we are loved by God. Modern Christianity often emphasizes that one is a Christian by believing certain things. But for 2,000 years Christians have also affirmed that it is possible not only to believe but to live the path of transformation. This path is a *kenosis* (pouring out) that empties us of obstacles to our love, like fear. As Josh Baldwin sings, '*My fear doesn't stand a chance when I stand in your love*'.<sup>3</sup> Or, as Hashini sang for us a bit

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<sup>3</sup> Josh Baldwin. Stand in Your Love.

earlier, *'How beautiful the feet that bring the sound of good news and the love of Christ our Lord. How beautiful the hands that serve the wine and the bread and the people of the earth. How beautiful, how beautiful, how beautiful is the body of Christ.'*<sup>4</sup>

Friends, there are many here at Saint James who have been instruments of the Good News. Our time and our world and our nation and our community have needs for Good News... in racial relationships, in health and education and access to services like internet. There is much work to be done, how will you participate in building the peace in God's kin-dom?

May it be so. So be it. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Twila Paris. CCLI Song # 443594 © 1990 Ariose Music | Mountain Spring Music  
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