

As many of you will know, I have recently been accepted for Licensed Lay Ministry training which will start in September and which I'm very excited about. As part of my interview I was asked to give a presentation on What the Good News of the Gospel Is. I would like to share with you some of that presentation along with some other thoughts.

First, let's pray:

Heavenly father we give thanks for the good news that we find in your word and we ask that you would guide and help us to proclaim your Kingdom as we live our lives serving you. Amen

First of all, I'd like to share a quote by Dan Carson that I found recently which reads "I would like to buy about three quid's worth of gospel, please. Not too much - just enough to make me happy, but not so much that I get addicted. I don't want so much gospel that I learn to really hate covetousness and lust. I certainly don't want so much that I start to love my enemies, cherish self-denial, and contemplate missionary service in some alien culture. I want ecstasy, not repentance; I want transcendence, not transformation. I would like to be cherished by some nice, forgiving, broad-minded people, but I myself don't want to love people who aren't like me. I would like enough gospel to make my family secure and my children well behaved, but not so much that I find my ambitions redirected or my giving too greatly enlarged. I would like about three quid's worth of gospel, please".

Now, I have been familiar with several bibles in our family from the small bible given to me at my baptism, to the Children's Bible I was given one Christmas, to the old Family Bible which takes pride of place in the bookcase, but the first bible that I actually asked for back in 1976 was the Good News Bible. It was at a time that I was being prepared for confirmation and when I was eager to learn all I could. However, I'm not sure that the real good news of the gospel became clear to me until much later on. In fact, I would place the real beginning of my journey to understanding the Good News, to Trinity Sunday 2014 and see this as a real

example of God's timing according to his will - taking 52 years for Sunday School stories to become Gospel truths!

In the Bible, as with our own spiritual journeys, a seed must first be set in us before the new testament disciples or we can become seed sowers ourselves. So it must be acknowledged that the Good News of the Gospels in the New Testament were first alluded to by the prophets of the Old Testament for example in Isaiah chapter 53 Jesus's birth, human experiences and subsequent death are quite clearly talked about. Bringing us to the New Testament, Mark says in only the second verse of his Gospel "as it is written in Isaiah the prophet" and in the first verse referring to the "good news of Jesus Christ, the son of God"; Matthew begins by recording the genealogy of Jesus Christ, going right back to Abraham of the Old Testament, and of course John's gospel begins with an explanation of the fact that Jesus has been a part of the Trinity before and at the time of God's creation "He was in the beginning with God" verse 2 of the first chapter tells us.

I suppose the very simple way of expressing the Good News of the Gospel is that Jesus, the incarnate son of God was born as a vulnerable baby to humble parents only to suffer greatly 33 years later by being ridiculed, beaten and finally put to death on the cross for our sakes - that's you and me, and then to rise from the dead before he ascended into heaven to be with his and our father. If that isn't enough good news - and in my opinion - that is pretty amazing - then we have to look deeper and understand the other aspects relating to this rather simplistic explanation. Remembering that God didn't need to create us in the first place - He was enough on his own and that once man was created the voice of God was almost immediately disobeyed and although God continually gave the characters of the Old Testament second chances or ways to put things right, the sinful nature of man continued. Despite all of this, God still loved/loves us enough to provide that ultimate sacrifice for our sin, the final substitution, in the form of his only son, Jesus Christ. By the very grace of God we are saved by the fact that Jesus was put to death, was separated from his father for the time it took to bear all of our sins, the sins of the whole world, past present and future, a time of abject agony and despair for Jesus; and all we have to do to receive this free gift of forgiveness of

our sins and eternal life with God our father, is to have faith that this is what happened, put our complete trust in our saviour Jesus Christ and to offer repentance of our sins to him. Again remembering that God didn't need to do any of this, it must mean that he is such a gracious and loving God who cares enough to want to grant us these wonderful gifts, but also fills us with the power of his Holy Spirit to help and guide us on our spiritual journey. Now, that, I think is Good News!

But, you know, it doesn't end there. You see if we've experienced this Good News how could we possibly keep it to ourselves? Well, we can't! It is our job, as disciples or followers of Jesus to act as he commissioned those first disciples to do and to "make disciples of all nations", in other words to pass on this Good News to others using every opportunity that is given to us, as the apostle Paul instructed Timothy in his second letter to him "And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also". If we heard any other sorts of good news, from friends and family say - Jane has got straight As in her GCSEs, Fred and Emily are engaged, Sally is having a baby etc, we'd be delighted to share this news with others, as soon as we could, so how can we possibly hesitate in sharing the best News of all Good News that we find in the Gospels. The simple answer, according to Jesus, is that we can't and it is for this reason that we shouldn't settle for "three quid's worth". Listen to what Jesus said in Luke 9, 24 "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it" he could well have been addressing someone who just wanted to "dabble" in the gospel and just abide by the bits that suited them. Jesus is saying here it's all or nothing - if you want to go ahead and follow your own agendas and be a part time Christian then your journey will come to an end, but if you give up your own ways and follow me, truly encompassing all that it is to be a Christian then you will be granted the amazing gifts of forgiveness of sins and eternal life. You don't even need to pay three quid for this - they are God's free gifts to all who believe in Jesus and accept him into their lives.

The Apostle Paul talks about the tension he feels about living versus dying when he writes to the Philippians. In verse 1 chapter 21 he says, "For me to live is Christ

and to die is gain". He wanted to carry on living in order to spread the good news and proclaim God's Kingdom but he also had no fear and even looked forward to dying as he was assured, as we should be, of being with Christ in his Kingdom.

So, are we going for three quid's worth or are we going to look to our Lord Jesus, truly accept him into our lives and follow?

Amen