

Preach the Gospel - by Jim Higgs

Luke 4:18

I am honored to speak at the funeral of Thad McKinney (my friend of 46 years) When I was first told that he wanted me to speak I was also informed that he wanted me to speak about **“The Gospel.”** I had already thought about a message describing Thad as a **modern day Barnabas** whose name meant “son of encouragement.”

It hasn't been uncommon **for families** to ask me to preach the gospel at the funeral of a loved one. They were concerned about family members yet unsaved. But this is the first time that a person has chosen the subject for me before they died. Thad has responded to so many who asked him for a **favor**. So how could I refuse his request to preach the gospel at his funeral?

But the question that came to me was **“Why did he choose that subject?”** Knowing that most of those attending would be in the community of faith and no doubt have heard “the gospel” many times I was more inclined to focus on the Thad as an **exemplary Christian**. So I reflected a little about **his motivation** to ask for a message on “the gospel.” Let me share a few ideas that came to me:

1. His concern for neighbors who have been so kind to him. Have you noticed how difficult it is to share the gospel in your neighborhood, even the one right next door? We talk about the weather, the 49's, politics, but when it comes to the most vital and urgent thing in life we press the mute button. Perhaps that was on his heart...to make sure at his memorial service that his **good neighbors** would hear the Gospel of Jesus.
2. Maybe **church members** whom he has known, but who seemed to be lacking in Christian graces or uninterested in the fate of those without Jesus was his concern. Perhaps they might be touched when they hear the Gospel message and their hearts would be softened. They need to be reminded that the gospel is not about going to church, having communion, giving money or being on the board of the church. It's about a personal relationship with Jesus as their one and only Savior.

3. Perhaps he was thinking of those with whom he had shared the gospel and has not yet responded. Thad may have felt like Jesus when he said to a young man “you are not far from the Kingdom.” It is like the invitational song I often heard in my younger days:

“Almost persuaded, now to believe;
Almost persuaded, Christ to receive;
Seems now some soul to say, Go, Spirit, go thy way,
Some more convenient day. On thee I’ll call.”

Perhaps his funeral would be the time for their “Yes to the invitation to receive Jesus.” As Paul described the word “yes” is even forming in your heart and on your lips. “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is , the word of faith we are proclaiming, That if you confess with your mouth “Jesus is Lord”, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” Rom. 10:8-10

Several years ago I served an interim pastor in Anacortes, Washington. Joyce and I would meet every Wednesday night with a group of a dozen or so to pray. One lady, the lady who counted and deposited the offerings to the church, shared with us that she had often spoken to her mother about how much God loved her, that God had given His son to be a sacrifice for her sins. That Jesus was raised and is coming again. But as yet her mother had not responded. She asked for prayer because her mother was in the hospital and she would be going that evening to sit by her in these last hours of her life. The next morning I received a call. The daughter was so excited. She said as she sat by her mother’s bed praying for her. Her mother sat up straight and said, “I believe.” Then she lay back down and quietly slipped into eternity. **But her word of faith gave tremendous hope to her daughter.** It was not unlike the dying thief who looked to Jesus on the cross and prayed, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus responded, “I tell you the truth, **today** you will be with me in paradise.”

4. Since Christmas, Thad and I have experienced the reality that we might not be long for this earth and we have kind of teased each other about who would be the first to go. But our conversation would ultimately turn to the certainty of the promises of the Bible and that when it happened it would be the best time of our life. **We bank on the words of Jesus “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my father’s house are many rooms, if it were not so I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” John 14:1-3** I want you to know that Thad wanted his friends to know that he approached dying with a certain anticipation. **“Eyes have not seen nor ear heard neither has it entered into the mind of man what God has prepared for those who love him.” I Cor. 2:9** So, **“We do not sorrow as others who have no hope.”**

When I served as pastor in Dallas there was a pianist that wrote the chorus, **“Heaven is a wonderful place- full of glory and grace. I’m going to see my Savior’s face. Heaven is a wonderful place.”**

Finally, I want to thank Thad for asking me to preach the gospel. In preparation for this message I looked at a number of books for sermons about the gospel. I wanted to know how great preachers of the past preached The Gospel. I was somewhat amazed at the absence of such a sermon until I opened a book entitled Dwight L. Moody.

As a young man working as a shoe salesman he was approached by his Sunday school teacher to believe the gospel. Moody did and became one of the most productive evangelists in Christian history. And there it was the sixth and seventh chapters: The Gospel (part one and part two.)

His text was spoken by Jesus as He began his public ministry. **“The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.”** Then this startling confession of Moody as began his sermon in New York City. In his introduction he said.

“I HAVE SPOKEN A GREAT MANY TIMES IN NEW YORK CITY, BUT I BELIEVE I NEVER PREACHED THE GOSPEL HERE BUT ONCE. THAT WAS TWELVE OR FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, DOWN IN TOMBS (tumes--places of dentition like jails) I HAVE TRIED TO AROUSE CHRISTIANS UP TO WORK. PEOPLE ARE IN THE HABIT OF THINKING THAT ANYTHING THAT IS IN THE WAY OF A RELIGIOUS MEETING IS THE GOSPEL; BUT THEY ARE MISTAKEN. I HAVE HAD A NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS, COMPLAINING BECAUSE I DON'T PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE PEOPLE. I WANT TO TELL YOU, IF I CAN, WHAT THE GOSPEL IS. I believe I was converted 14 years before I knew what the gospel meant...Then he went on to define the Gospel which mean “good news. God’s spell.”

Well I want to think that Thad’s request was the conviction that he held about what a funeral service should have. “It’s not about me, but all about Jesus. It’s not my story, but the good news about **His story.**”

It’s not facts about my earthly pilgrimage, but the historic facts upon which the gospel message is based. The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. The message of the gospel is the one that has eternal consequences.

The Greek word “euaggelion” means “good news.” That word is used 75 times in the second testament. Ironically, it is only **good news** to those who come to terms with the “**bad news.**” The bad news is true and needs to have serious consideration. i.e.

God is holy and we are not. We are by nature sinners and persist in practicing sinful acts...lying, stealing, cheating, killing, envying and hating. It doesn’t mean that we are the worst of all people, but it means that God cannot excuse our misbehavior. To be ungodly simply means that until we respond the truths of the Gospel we are without God.

God is just and eventually all humans Jesus will stand before the divine Great White Throne to be judged according to their deeds. Unwillingness to accept Gods’ words about salvation clinches the sentence. “Depart from me I have never know you. “

When those truths have got our attention we are ready to hear the good news. **God is Love. He doesn't take pleasure in the death of any.** He has provided a way to escape the judgment for sin.

John 3:16 (shall not perish,)

He provided Jesus his son to take my place and receive the judgment I deserved. Jesus is the Savior from my sins. I am accepted in the beloved One. I sign all my correspondence, **In Christ**, Jim (when the Father looks upon me he sees his Son...the beloved one.

He alone lived a perfect life. He offered that perfect life as a sacrifice on the cross. His death and burial were accepted by the Holy and Just Father in Heaven. So he was raised from death and ascended into heaven and will return to receive His followers.

So if I could sing I might sing the song of Thad:

"I am bound for the Promised Land (repeat)
Oh who will come and join with me
I am bound for the Promised Land."

What shall I do to be saved?

Admit to your helpless condition. Be honest I am poor, bankrupt of any cleanness, "There is none good not one."

Repent of your unbelief and **receive** Jesus as your one and only **Savior**. Begin to be His follower.

For all of us who have that personal relationship I would like to ask," what if every pastor, priest, or rabbi in San Francisco, Daly City, San Bruno and South San Francisco would stand before the people this coming Saturday or Sunday morning and say," The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach the Gospel to the poor?" What a spiritual awakening it ignite?

Maybe that's what Thad wanted—a reminder of our calling--preach the Gospel to the poor.

