Good News Is Louder than Fear

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Luke 2:10-14 (CEB)
10 The angel said, “Don’t be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news
for all people. 11 Your savior is born today in David’s city. He is Christ the Lord. 12 This is a
sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger.” 13 Suddenly
a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, 14 “Glory to
God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors.”

It seems that, for as long as anyone can remember, bad news has dominated the headlines. And for just as long, people have complained that those who report the news focus too much on the bad things – things like disasters, wars, and crimes; and not enough on the good things – like community events, acts of generosity, or unsung heroes. And while it’s true that those who report the news often lean into negative stories, spawning the infamous slogan “if it bleeds, it leads,” we can’t blame it all on the media. Bad news sells.

Sociologists identify a human trait known as “negativity bias,” a proclivity for focusing on negative feelings and events more than positive ones. We all tend to focus more quickly on negative information than positive, to respond more strongly to negative stimulation, and to dwell on past failures or traumatic memories.

We know this to be true in ourselves. If ten people compliment you during a day and one criticizes you, which is more likely to be on your mind at the end of the day?

In the spring of 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic forced us all into isolation, actor and director John Krasinski created a YouTube show titled “Some Good News.” Krasinski has directed and appeared in a number of feature films, though he is probably best known for playing Jim in The Office. “Some Good News” was wonderfully low-budget and low-tech, with graphics hand-drawn and colored by Krasinski’s children and taped to the wall. Krasinski sat behind a desk in his home wearing a jacket and tie, but the rest of his outfit was the sort of thing you could only get away with on Zoom – shorts, pajama pants, once even a tutu. Each episode featured Krasinski sharing positive stories of how people were coping with the pandemic. He concluded each show by saying, “Remember, no matter how dark it gets, there is always good in the world.” The episodes were only about fifteen minutes long, and they’re all still available on YouTube. I highly recommend episode two for its sheer joy and some of my favorite cameo appearances. He only made eight episodes, as restrictions relaxed and things began to return to

some semblance of normalcy. But those eight episodes were a beacon of hope in a time of great uncertainty. Unfortunately, it didn't take long for the wave of negativity to return and for bad news to once again dominate our attention.

The title of this message today is "Good News Is Louder than Fear." But is it? We live in a world that weaponizes fear, where algorithms decide what gets our attention, where we measure our level of commitment by our level of outrage. And the resulting state of heightened anxiety leaves us ill-equipped to look to the future with any measure of hope. Yet the story we tell tonight is all about hope. Our gathering here is a witness to a persistent hope, a light that shines in the darkness, a darkness that cannot overcome it.

It's not only this story. All your favorite stories are shaped the same way. The "boy who lived," protected primarily by a mother's love, faces off against a dark magic so terrifying that even the world's most powerful wizards are afraid to say his name. A hobbit slips past armies of orcs and wicked men in a battle for Middle Earth and destroys the Ring of Power, eradicating the evil that threatens to take over the world. A boy from a forgotten planet learns to channel the Force and takes down the Galactic Empire. Disney has gotten into the act, eschewing the old princess formula and focusing on unsung heroes in Moana, Coco, and Encanto. Even Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, in the beloved 1964 stop-motion animation TV special, overcomes the abominable snowman and the foggy weather to restore the joy of Christmas.

The child born this night did not use magic to defeat an evil wizard, destroy a talisman of unlimited power, or maneuver an x-wing starfighter into position to blow up the death star. As far as we know, he never faced off with a yeti, either. This is a story of hope that comes through healing and forgiveness, a hope that grows one person at a time – a hope not of conquest but solidarity. It is the story of a God who loves us enough to draw near as one of us, entering the world no different than any of us, as a vulnerable and helpless infant. Jesus's origin story is even more unlikely than those other heroes: born in the humblest circumstances imaginable, proclaimed among the least valued people in society, sought after by the wisest people in the world who bypassed palaces and mansions to find him. It is good news of great joy for all people, because God came to be near not just to some of us, but all of us – no matter who we are or what we've done.

The world needs this Good News. It needs us to tell it, again and again. We need to tell it to one another…and to ourselves…precisely because we live in such a fearful world.

So, tonight, listen to the song of the angels. Run with the shepherds to Bethlehem. Gaze with wonder upon this unexpected birth, the shocking vulnerability of God made flesh. Then go with haste to proclaim the Good News to a world filled with fear: Christ is born! Emmanuel has come! God is with us!

And be sure to receive this Good News in your own heart, because you need it, too. Sing “Silent Night” in the hushed awe of a moment where the space between heaven and earth is incredibly thin. Then proclaim, “Joy to the World!” with every ounce of your being, with all the strength and conviction you can muster. Is Good News louder than fear? Tonight, let us make it so. Amen.

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