

Proper 16C
Luke 13:10-17
August 24, 2025

“Good News or Bust”
The Rev. Dr. Brandon Perrine

¹⁰ Now [Jesus] was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. ¹¹ And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. ¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.” ¹³ When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. ¹⁴ But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the Sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, “There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured and not on the Sabbath day.” ¹⁵ But the Lord answered him and said, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it to water? ¹⁶ And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?” ¹⁷ When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame, and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things being done by him.

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A minister stood before her congregation one Sunday morning and announced, “I have good news and I have bad news.” That’s not how anyone wants a sermon to begin. She continued, “The good news is, we have enough money to pay for our building renovation. The bad news,” she concluded, “is that it’s still out there in your pockets.”¹

¹ “Good News, Bad News,” Upjoke.com: <https://upjoke.com/good-news-jokes>.

We all want good news, don't we? Many of us are absolutely longing for it. And truth be told, we want it now, or better yet, yesterday. We hear plenty of bad news. For some reason, that's the news that sells. It's what people *want* to hear, I guess. The stock market is down, inflation is up, wars over here, disasters over there, corruption is running rampant, everyone's favorite celebrity couple is splitting up, and nobody can seem to get along. Psychologists call that "negativity bias:" our collective prioritization of bad news over good news. If it bleeds, it leads, as the old newsroom maxim goes.

Scientists believe that negativity bias evolved as a survival mechanism. Paying close attention to gathering storm clouds, enemies' spears, or the saber-toothed cat running toward you increased your likelihood of survival. This ultimately led our brains to prioritize negative stimuli for the purpose of self-preservation. Media companies know this and they capitalize on it. After all, their goal is to sell papers – well, to sell online subscriptions, generate clicks, and increase views so that advertisers will invest and they can rake in the big bucks. To be fair though, there are journalists doing the hard work of balanced reporting and pointing out when people really do shine.

To be honest, I'm kind of relieved to know that humans are simply hardwired this way and that we're not all just a bunch of cynics. However, this should not be understood as an excuse to continue our endless doom scrolling. The near-constant flow of bad news creates "a numbing effect, where people either become desensitized to tragedies or experience heightened anxiety because they feel powerless to change the situation."² We need breaks, need to hear other voices, need to consume our news with intention, and sometimes we need good news. We may even need it now.

If I were to hazard a guess, that's probably how the crippled woman felt from our reading in Luke's gospel. She'd been hunched over, practically

² Charles R. Chaffin. "Why We're Drawn to Bad News," Psychologytoday.com, February 25, 2025: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/putting-psychology-into-practice/202502/why-were-drawn-to-bad-news>.

bent in half for the last 18 years. Imagine looking at nothing but the ground for 18 years. She was ready for good news right then and there. And Jesus gave it to her. “Woman,” he declared, “you are set free from your ailment.” As soon as he touched her, the text tells us that the woman stood up straight and started singing praises. Like always, Jesus’ good news was contextual and shared in the format it was needed. Hungry people received food; guilt-ridden people received forgiveness; blind people received their sight; deaf people, their hearing; sick people, healing; and even thirsty party people received wine. In the gospels, Jesus’ good news was always custom-tailored to the individual or groups receiving it. But ultimately, it was good news for everyone. Not like so much of the “good” news we’re fed today that really only benefits a very few.

And Jesus’ good news was also timely. Nobody waited to receive it. His news was real good news for everyone, in the form they needed, right then and there. He never promised folks that sometime in the future, they’d get the relief they needed. He worked fast and he delivered in the moment of people’s need. He embodied the good news people needed.

The truth is, that’s exactly what we’re called to do as well. In a world inundated with bad news, we’re called to share good news. The news we share is for everyone, but tailored to the unique needs of every person. The good news we share is also for right now. It’s not the promise of something good in the future, either in this world or the next. It had better be good news for every person, right here and right now or most folks won’t have any use for it at all.

So, what exactly is the good news that we at New England Congregational Church are called to share with the world in Jesus’ name? Like Jesus, I believe we’re called to bear witness to the realm of heaven – his dream of peace and plenty, justice and inclusion – and work to build it. For a hungry person, that looks like food. For an unhoused person, that looks like a roof over their head. For a lonely person, that looks like a friend. For a marginalized person that looks like community. The message is

contextualized for the person receiving it, but it is the same and it is good news for all. Love. Dignity. Respect. Community. Enough. Right now. That's what we're called to share and it is good news indeed.

As the prophet Isaiah once said, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news!"³ May we go forth from this place with good news on our lips, hearts and hands ready to serve it in whatever way it is needed, right here and right now, for all. Amen.

³ Isaiah 52:7, NRSV.