

The Good News about Bad News

HOMILY – JULY 16, 2006

Deacon Colleen Spaeth

Nobody likes bad news. Bad news is depressing, it should be avoided at all costs. Even bad stuff being said, well, why is it said anyway? In raising my kids I have often been heard saying to them, “if you don’t have anything good to say, don’t say anything at all.” The world is full of bad news, just look this weekend at the fighting going on in Israel and Lebanon, the war in Iraq, flooding all over the region, 7% sales tax, gas prices, and so much more.

Maybe there’s stuff we would rather not hear relating to our health, or the health of people we love. Maybe you’ve been told you have a serious health issue, diabetes maybe. We’d rather not hear the news, it makes us sad, worried. We know that lifestyles may change, we may have to change a diet, pills to take, and for sure things will have to be done differently than planned.

Even more importantly health issues remind us that we will not live forever, something philosophically we know, yes, but who wants it staring us in the face today?

And there can be not so good news that is political. Humanity has been in search of peace for thousands of years and it still eludes us.

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Certainly there are more that seek and want peace than war, but it is still war we read about in the headlines.

Even in the story today from Amos we hear Amos telling the King of Israel Jeroboam, that his kingdom is going to collapse. And the priest, Amaziah tells Amos to go back where he came from, don't spread any bad news around here buddy.

I wonder if it's important, though, to understand that sometimes bad news is not only necessary, but in the long run it is best and maybe even actually good, maybe not good news, but good for us to know. A person with diabetes now knows about the disease, and the news will require a change of habits, maybe some medication, careful monitoring, but when those things happen a person can affect the years of his/her life, the choice is theirs, options are available.

As many of you know, I have been, along with my sisters caring for my mom who a year ago was diagnosed with esophageal cancer. I remember the day I first got the news, it was a day I'll never forget. Cancer, with all the good things being done for all types, still hearing the word cancer, is still something that can take

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your breath away, bring pains to your stomach, and definitely depresses you. It did all those things to me.

The chemo was worse than the cancer, the radiation was just as bad – our days changed, our outlooks on our days changed, some bad news, yes, but much much more than just that.

Maybe some of you know what I mean. Okay bad news, cancer, but yet look what I have found – I have found time to have a new meaning, what I always knew was important, love and family, coming to the forefront, and to the back burner goes issues of personality differences, money issues, even religion. Faith becomes a strong shoulder to lean on.

When someone you love is dying the everyday conversation changes. It's no longer, Hi Mom, how are you – fine, how are you? We're really busy, but we'll see ya soon, mom – take care.

Now the minutes on the phone bill add up, now it's Hi Mom, how is your day going, can I come cook dinner for you, want to take a walk, tell me how your spirit is, Mom. And fine is no longer an answer, but rather, Oh, today the pain isn't so bad, or you know

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what, I'm getting tired of waiting around to die, I want to go back to work and work a few hours until I can't go any more. I want to live until I can't any more. Come and see me, spend the night, let's laugh today.

Do I wish it all wasn't happening sometime? Sure, almost every day. But knowing mom has cancer, and knowing her time is short has made all the clichés true, life is short, don't sweat the small stuff, and it's all small stuff ! I am more and more aware that time is short for me, and others I love, and that today is the day to celebrate, today is the day to smile, to appreciate, the choice is mine and mine alone on how I chose to see this day through, in a joyful or not so joyful state, to know my God and remember that he knows me and my mom.

So I wonder have I turned bad news into good? Is that possible?

St. Paul touches on a situation in his letter to the Ephesians. He says, "the Lord works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will." Now this doesn't mean that God controls every single thing we do every single moment.

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We must pay attention, I think, to the verse that comes just before it, “God has a plan for the fullness of time.” God has a design, a plan, and we have the option to chose to be a part of that grand design, or not. When our health is not what it used to be, when changes have to happen, we have the option to do what it takes to get healthier, to live to the fullest, make lifestyle changes, take the medications we need, exercise more, pay attention more, make adjustments or not, or we can chose a course of action that may harm our health and shorten our life, but God permits us to choose that option.

In today’s readings we learn that if we want to be followers of Jesus, we are required to be messengers of the news, good or bad. Jesus sent out his disciples two by two and gave them instructions, get out there and pray with people, tell them about me, lay hands on them, check out those unclean spirits, for heaven’s sake, but preach the good news about me. Tell them about me. If what they observed was sin, he told them call those folk to repentance, tell them there’s a better way! For Pete’s sake!!

But what I like about Jesus’s message, he made no effort to tell his disciples to coerce anyone. If the folk they went to and tried to

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share their news and faith with weren't willing to listen, the disciples were told to "shake the dust off their feet" and move on.

When we face the evils that exist in our world today, we should be bold to say, "that is wrong – change your ways." Where we see sin, we should say so. Where we see wrong, we should condemn it. We may not be successful in the battle against sin, especially in the way many in the world measure success. After all, we have tried for centuries to bring about peace in the world, and yet peace still eludes us.

But our faith, our assurance are not based in this time or this place. Jesus tells us that we can trust in God to provide. "Take nothing for the journey..." The measure of success will be judged in another time, another place when we reach the end of this journey. In St. Paul's words, God's plan is a plan "for the fullness of time, to unite all things in heaven and earth."

If we are truly followers as well as messengers of Jesus, the joy that we have today comes from the knowledge that no matter WHAT God will provide, that one day bad news and good news will just become news. We just have to hold on tightly to our faith.

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Of course, we can't do anything alone, and the good news is that we are never asked nor is it expected that we are to be in charge, we are never asked to take over, but rather we are called to live the ordinary extraordinarily well, we are called to be faithful, and that is the good news.

Amen.