

A Handful of Theology: 5 Points about The Good News
by Russ Dean

Based on my lifetime of reading and studying the Gospel of Mark, I offer the following “handful of theology.” Mr. Graham’s message was front page news. I’ll be interested to see where you print this.

1 – You are loved. All of you. It’s the most important message we offer from our pulpit, every single Sunday: “You are loved. You are forgiven. Be at peace.”

2 – It’s good news. Unfortunately the Church sounds mostly like bad news to too many people today. (The Observer proved it again on Tuesday.) Jesus’ message was this simple: The kingdom of God is at hand. No matter where you’ve been, what you’ve done, come what may, God is with you. If the message your church offers doesn’t sound like good news – please find one that does. (We do exist!)

3 – This is hard stuff. The basic message can be stated simply, though doing so often obscures the message because life is never simple. So as we work out scriptural truths we must always do so, carefully. Read again. Listen again. Ask the hard questions. Good theology won’t fit on a bumper sticker.

4 – It’s about relationship. Mark spends a third of his gospel on the last week of Jesus’ life, and his death, so the cross is the right symbol for Christian faith – but only if we understand it. (See #3 above.) The cross isn’t about Jesus dying for your sins as much as it is about you... taking up your “cross” and following. Love that does not cost you anything is not love. So if you want to understand the cross, you have to learn to live, sacrificially, to love as Jesus loved.

5 – Love never fails. Mark’s gospel includes no record of appearances of the resurrected Jesus, only a promise: “you will see him.” This is the premise of faith, and the promise of hope, which never disappoints us. Love never fails. Nothing will ever separate us from God’s love. This is what resurrection means, but it’s up to us to look for it.

After almost 51 years of reading again, and listening carefully, and asking the hard questions, this is what it comes down to for me: the Gospel begins and ends with love, and really *is* good news. But it is news that is sometimes hard to understand, which is why we need to be in relationship with one another, loving one another, accepting one another, welcoming one another.

As Jesus did.