

SCREEN: Good News main screen

So I just decided to cancel home delivery of the newspaper because my subscription includes digital access and most days I read the paper on my iPad.

On here the news gets updated throughout the day.

And I check another half dozen news websites a couple of times a day on my iPad or phone.

One of my friends calls me a news junkie.

I can't help it.

I blame it on my high school social studies teacher.

He made us read the newspaper for homework and every class began discussing current events.

From that time on, I've always followed the news.

Now you may not be as bad as me when it comes to the news, but like it or not, there is no avoiding it.

The news is everywhere and has a way of bursting into our lives.

One network has 'breaking news' for another its 'news alerts'.

It's all designed to grab viewers' attention; make them stop what they're doing and take notice.

The sad thing is that so much of it is bad news.

Well for the next month, we are going to be talking about good news!

Something I think we can all use in our lives.

And the title and some of the key ideas I'll share came from our friends at Nativity Catholic Church.

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So let me start with a little background.

Every time we attend Mass, we hear a reading taken from one of the four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The word gospel is literally translated as 'good news'.

Jesus used both terms when he preached.

What's in these four books that is so good?

SCREEN: God's good news was brand new!

First of all, they tell us about something that had never happened before in the history of the world.

If you go all the way back to the Book of Genesis and the Garden of Eden, you learn that it was God's plan for humanity to be close to him always; to live happy and peaceful and perfect lives forever.

But our first parents - Adam and Eve - disobeyed God.

Their sin resulted in a distance between themselves and the Lord.

Sadly, this happened again and again in Scripture.

God would say to his Chosen People,

'here's how to live so you can be happy and we can stay close',

then they'd turn away from God.

So God made a plan to save them - to save us.

He sent his Son Jesus as the savior of the world.

This was brand new - truly 'breaking news'.

SCREEN: God's good news changed everything!

Here's another point:

Jesus's life and his message changed everything for all time.

The world was never the same after Jesus rose from the dead.

Think of it, history is marked by years that are counted as being either before or after Christ.

That's how much Jesus's good news changed everything for all time.

SCREEN: God's good news is for us!

The third point about this good news is that it is for me and you and every person who ever lived or ever will live.

For each of us individually and personally.

And we should always hear it as good news.

Let's be honest; the way some churches present Jesus's message makes it sound like bad news, but it's not.

In Luke's gospel when the angel announced Jesus's birth to the shepherds he said:

I proclaim to you good news of great joy!

The good news of Jesus should give people joy and hope, not make them feel sad or hopeless.

I love what Pope Francis said soon after he was elected.

He said, *we need to tell people what we are for, not just what we are against.*

That was breaking news! But really good news.

SCREEN: God's good news must change us!

And my final point about good news is that what Jesus said and did must change us.

It must change everything about us; should change how we live every day, how we treat others, how we spend our time and our money.

And when we are changed, then our world is changed, which is God's plan.

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Now, let's look at today's Gospel.

Let me set the scene.

Jesus was traveling from town to town announcing the good news and one day he came to a village called Jericho.

The townsfolk must have gotten the 'news alert' that Jesus was coming because a large crowd welcomed him.

Everyone wanted to see Jesus and I mean everyone, including Zacchaeus the chief tax collector.

Being short in stature, his best hope for seeing Jesus was to climb a tree.

But when Jesus walked past, Zacchaeus got much more than a glimpse.

Jesus stopped, look up and said,

Zacchaeus come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house!

There are a couple things about this that stand out.

First, we heard that Jesus intended to pass through Jericho;
not stop, not stay at anyone's house.

Jesus changed his plans - he made time to be with Zacchaeus.

Of all the people in town Zacchaeus was the last person
anyone would have expected Jesus to talk to.

Tax collectors were universally hated.

They worked for the Roman government collecting money from every citizen.

Most tax collectors were cheats.

Rome got their cut, and the tax collector took his own.

But Zacchaeus' encounter with Jesus was so profound,
he vowed to change his life on the spot.

He said for all to hear, *I'm giving away half of all my possessions to help the poor.*

Remember, he was a wealthy man.

Zacchaeus didn't stop there.

He committed himself to repaying anyone he cheated four times over.

Which led Jesus to say this:

SCREEN: Today salvation has come to this house

because this man too is a descendant of Abraham.

For the Son of Man has come to seek

and to save what was lost.

YOU: So what happened here that was such good news?

Jesus arrived in Jericho *and* arrived in the life of Zacchaeus.

Jesus didn't show up with a list of Zacchaeus' failings;
didn't say,

"So you're the cheater, you're the sinner I've heard about!"

No, Jesus showed up with love for Zacchaeus that was

so pure, so unconditional, and so unexpected that it caused Zacchaeus to see all the ways he'd fallen short of the mark, and he decided instantly to change his life.

That was good news for Zacchaeus and the tax payers of Jericho!

But what Jesus did in this story was not just for one person or one town, it was for all of us.

SCREEN: Good news: Jesus seeks us out when we are lost.

The good news is that Jesus always makes time for us; wants to be with us.

Jesus seeks us out when we are lost.

And we can all get lost in life sometimes.

Sometimes it's just the busy-ness and overscheduling of life that pulls us away from Christ and our faith.

It might be the burdens of life that are keeping you from seeing God clearly.

And the bowl in front of the altar contains all the struggles you shared last weekend.

Sometimes we can lose our way by making poor choices and bad decisions.

We can make our lives all about our career or possessions or pleasure or a certain relationship.

Not bad things, but not what's most important.

And if something other than God is first in our lives,

we end up like Zacchaeus - up a tree -

struggling to see Christ clearly.

The good news is that God does not abandon us in those times.

Like I said, he makes time for us.

And just like with Zacchaeus, God seeks us out when we mess things up.

He arrives in our lives with the same pure, unconditional and unexpected love he had for Zacchaeus.

Jesus invites us down from any tree we are stuck in and says,

"Today I must stay with you!"

God loves us where we are, but does not leave us there.

This incredibly good news from Jesus should fill you with joy and hope.

No matter what you've done in your life,
no matter how close or far you see yourself to God,
please know that he loves you and wants to dwell with you.

So be like Zacchaeus: accept Christ's invitation, hurry down and
let him into your life.

If this is something you know you need and want,
begin by accepting God's offer of unconditional love.

I want to give you two action steps to help today's good news
take root in your life this week.

First, every day this week spend a few moments reflecting on the story of Zacchaeus.
You can easily find it online and this homily will be posted on our website on
Monday afternoon so you can listen to the Gospel story again.

As you hear or read it, imagine yourself in the place of Zacchaeus.
Hear Jesus speaking the words directly to you.

Do that every day this week.

And the second action step is to help out someone
who may be lost or hurting.

Last weekend we began our Thanksgiving food drive called,
Families Helping Families.

There is a display in the entranceway with flyers
and the information is also in the bulletin.

Every year we help more than one hundred families have a Thanksgiving dinner.
One change we made this year is that all of the food you donate will be dropped off
here at church, right at the display today and for the next two weekends.

We hope this change will increase participation so we can help more
of our brothers and sisters in need.

When you help someone else who is hurting, your faith grows;

you grow in love and generosity and you help build Christ's Kingdom.

So two action steps to respond to today's good news;
something for you and something for someone in need.

SCREEN: Good News main screen

God loves us so much.

Every day he offers to fill us with joy and hope.

Let us respond to his invitation this week

that Christ's gospel - his good news - may be shared with others. Amen. +

GOSPEL READING LUKE 19: 1-10

At that time, Jesus came to Jericho and intended to pass through the town.

Now a man there named Zacchaeus,
who was a chief tax collector and also a wealthy man,
was seeking to see who Jesus was;
but he could not see him because of the crowd,
for he was short in stature.

So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus,
who was about to pass that way.

When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said,
*"Zacchaeus, come down quickly,
for today I must stay at your house."*

And he came down quickly and received him with joy.

When they all saw this, they began to grumble, saying,
"He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner."

But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord,
*"Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor,
and if I have extorted anything from anyone
I shall repay it four times over."*

And Jesus said to him,

*"Today salvation has come to this house
because this man too is a descendant of Abraham.*

For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost."