

# Sermon for Sunday, August 23, 2020 - "The News You Need to Start Your Day"

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Decorah, Iowa  
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[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

This week, a phrase on a morning news show caught my attention. Every morning I listen to a short podcast produced by National Public Radio called "Up First." Each show is just about 12 minutes long and includes three top news stories from that morning's headlines. Every day the hosts of the show say something like, "We've got the news you need to start your day." That phrase caught my attention this week. Is *this* really the news I need to start my day? Do I need to enter the morning hearing that yet another school moved online due to COVID outbreaks? Do I need to be reminded of record unemployment before I've even had coffee? Is it essential that I learn about protests in Belarus first thing? I want to be informed. I want to be a good global citizen, but is *this* the news I need as the day begins?

As we head into school or work in the midst of a pandemic; as we face another long day stuck at home; as we worry about loved ones, our country and our world; what news do we really need to start the day well? What message will help us begin again with a sense of hope and courage? The church is entrusted with sharing good news that we all need each day - good news that in Christ Jesus, God is active in our world bringing life, freedom, justice, well-being.

In our reading from Matthew today, Jesus talks about the church for the first time and gives us the authority to share that good news. Jesus says he will give the church the keys to the kingdom of heaven. That can sound like Jesus is saying the church will determine who gets into the pearly gates of a glorious afterlife. Sometimes it has been understood that way.

Yet, when Jesus talks about heaven, he isn't talking about a place we'll go after we die. He's talking about the life that God intends for us to know on earth - a life of justice, mercy and peace ordered by God. Heaven is God's realm, God's kingdom coming on earth. Jesus is giving us the keys to that. Which is to say, Jesus is entrusting us with helping people to enter into God's presence - helping people to experience God's love and mercy.

We do this by bearing witness to the good news that God is at work, that God is with us, that God does not abandon us, that God forgives us. Sometimes we bear witness to this with words, sometimes with actions; but the church's role is to help people know and experience the good news of God's active presence in the world.

Jesus also gives us the task of binding and loosing. Binding can look like wrapping people close in the promises of God that hold us together, assuring people that we belong to God. Loosing can look like setting people free of fear, anxiety, guilt and shame. The church shares this good news with

you and all people: You belong to God; God loves you and sets you free; you need not fear; you can give of yourself in love.

This is news we need to start the day.

And oh, the world is hungry for good news these days. For an eight-week period at the beginning of the pandemic, actor John Krasinski had a great show on YouTube called *Some Good News*. He made it his mission to share uplifting stories: A taxi driver in Italy who donated hours of his time driving COVID patients to the hospital; a man who sang to his wife every day outside the window of her nursing home room; a car parade for a teenage cancer survivor after she finished chemo; and so many other heartwarming stories. Krasinski also created good news. He did an online wedding, offered a fun prom experience for high schoolers, and hosted a virtual graduation in which seniors got to talk with their heroes. One of the graduates offered a poem that brought me hope for weeks. The show was a huge hit - almost three-million people subscribed to the YouTube channel. I loved the show, every episode brought me to tears. When it ended after just eight episodes as lockdowns and stay at home orders were ending, I was devastated. Surely, we still needed good news - as the spring of 2020 turned to summer, we needed it more than ever. Yet, maybe the weight of all the bad news in the world was just too great. The small anecdotes about some people's acts of kindness were just not enough in the face of all the challenges in front of us.

This is why we need the church. The work of the church is to share good news in every season, in every time, day in and day out. The work of the church is to interpret small acts of kindness as glimpses of how God intends all of life to be when God's kingdom comes on earth - as signs that God is at work through all of humanity to bring healing and hope. The work of the church is to set people free from despair, guilt and fear so that we can give of ourselves in these acts of kindness and service.

Jesus has given us this task. He's also given us a promise - a promise that the church is built upon a rock and that nothing will prevail upon it, not even Hades, the place of death and desolation. At times it feels like the gates to that place are wide open, assaulting our world. Yet, Jesus promises that the church will prevail - even when buildings are closed, even when things look different. The message of the church will get through and will set people free.

Christ has promised to be present and at work in and through the church always.  
Through the church, Christ speaks good news to you today.  
You are set free to hope, to serve, to give of yourself in love.  
You are set free to show good news to the world.