

“The Invitation!”

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*1st Presbyterian Church
Wilkes-Barre, PA
Mark 1:14-28*

My grandson “Bobby” celebrated his first birthday this past Thursday. He had a party. Invitations went out a few weeks ago. I adjusted my schedule to make the party. Of course I did! Oh the gifts! So many toys! And he ripped into them. Although he seemed to be more interested in the paper than the toys.

He’s walking now, and what did he get? A motorized car.

We all had a great time!

Invitations. I saw this 60th birthday party invitation. It read “New and Improved! 60 yr old”*

Below, in smaller print it read *Please note that the 59 yr old model has been discontinued. (ouch)

How about this invitation? On the front cover – “I was always taught to respect my elders, now I don’t have anyone to respect.”

I found this unique Wedding invitation. It is a chocolate bar in a blue wrapper. “Invitation, Celebration” is scrolled across the top of the bar wrapper in white lettering. Two glasses of milk are being poured into a heart with the names of the bride and groom. On the other side of the wrapper are “Ingredients: 3 cups love. 2 cups warmth, 1 cup forgiveness, 2 spoons affection, 2 spoons hope, 1 pint faith, 1 barrel laughter, unlimited friends. Recipe: Mix love and affection, flour it with forgiveness. Blend thoroughly with hope. Stir in faith and laughter. Bake with warmth. Garnish with all friends. Serve daily in generous helpings. Join us and be a part of the ingredients to make this celebration sweeter and memorable.” Then it lists wedding time, reception time and location.

A very sweet invitation!

So many invitations for a myriad of occasions. You have received invitations from family members and friends; from Baby Shower invitations to birthday invitations, to party invitations, and many others.

This morning I want to share with you an invitation that has been offered over and over and over again and again and again, from generation to generation to generation, from family to family from friend to friend, from community to community, from nation to nation, from continent to continent – a life changing invitation! – a way of life invitation!

To far too many this invitation has become ho-hum – blasé – and yet this invitation holds the key to a way of life that gives direction and declares purpose for one’s life!!

You've heard it before – it's the Gospel! The Good News of Jesus Christ! The Way! Early on in our Christian history the Christians called this commitment, this way of life, as the way! It still fits.

The earliest followers of Jesus had found a way to live – a way that gave purpose, and meaning in their lives through this Jesus fellow. At that point very few had heard about him, who he was, what he thought, said and did. So his followers (disciples) had an absolute necessity to get the message out – to others!

Today, practically everyone you come in contact with will have heard of Jesus Christ and will have multiple thoughts and opinions on who he was and is. Today Jesus Christ has been domesticated, denigrated, deconstructed and delineated to such an extent that there are a myriad of people living lives within our communities – that could greatly benefit from experiencing Christianity, Jesus Christ – within this very sanctuary.

Don't you know someone who could use some Good News? Don't you know someone who has not found his/her way, is searching and could use some help to find their way?

My friends, the human desire, and drive for something more; for the transcendent, for meaning, for purpose – hasn't gone away – but the fervor of the Christian church has diminished. We have “Good News!” It's here, within our lives, within our grasp! And yet, we are demure about this “Good News.” This powder keg of a way to live, is more or less a social appendage of one's life.

The invitation is ever present!

If you really believe that this is “Good News” what in the world would you do with it?

- bury it?
- Lock it away?
- Keep it secret?
- Ignore it?
- Be ashamed of it?

Or – share it! This Good News Way of Life!

Over the past year, year and a half, some 800 British red buses in London carried the sign:

“There is probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.”

Oxford zoologist Richard Dawkins, leading atheist and author of The God Delusion, jumped on board further evangelizing for atheism.

Now from my reading, this sequence of events was precipitated by some Christian fundamentalists donning Biblical quotes on buses at an earlier date. Some atheists thought – “o.k. it's our turn.” And a turn they took.

Professor Emeritus Gabriel Fackre, of the Andover Newton Theological School in Boston offered, “The bus ads simply echo the secular premises of society...there's no longer a protestant orthodoxy in Great Britain or America. The churches are in a counterculture position whether they realize it or not. That puts us much closer to first century Christianity, and that is an opportunity for the church.”

I believe Professor Fackre is on to something. My concern is not the secular – for it is all a gift from God. What does concern me is radical secularism – which diminishes any and all religion, which dogmatically

pontificates values (without footing) and which ultimately leaves all existence empty, void and without form. I previously used the phrase “evangelizing for atheism” (via the buses), “evangelizing” is from the Greek which translates “good news.” These atheists are inviting others with their good news (a way of life) that declares there is probably no God (by the way, Dawkins wanted that stronger, but the advertising officials won the day), “(so)...you can stop worrying...” - well actually for me and I dare say billions of others – positing no God, i.e., no purpose, meaning, foundation for values, and ethics, and no enduring love to name a few – worrying would just be the beginning!

So you can stop worrying and “enjoy your life.” Yes, my friends, my loved ones – see the bright shiny red bus and its message – enjoy your life. It will be “nasty, brutish and short,” as correctly perceived by 17th century philosopher Thomas Hobbes’ atheistic view of humanity.

Yes, indeed – enjoy your life...as it fades all around you, from the withered flowers, to your failing years and the eclipsing generations of your family, to the intense love that is felt to the marrow of our bones – which will disappear as swiftly as our breathes on a cool evening. Yes. Yes – enjoy your life – in all its wonder of nothingness, it’s pretending that this and that matters, fool ourselves into living for the future, our children and grandchildren, keeping at bay – the emptiness that awaits all!!

Fool yourselves – stop worrying and enjoy your life!

Is that the Good News to choose?!

And then there is this other invitation – way of life, that proclaims that time matters, and God exists and has a Kingdom, Realm, way of living that fulfills human lives, and rejects the nihilistic thought that our lives are “nasty, brutish, and short.”

Jesus isn’t shy, doesn’t falter, he intuitively sees, believes that there is a destiny for all those created in the image of God, men, women and children! And even for the rest of creation! Out he goes! “Hey, wake up! The time is now! This Good News will change your very lives!”

He’s at the Sea of Galilee, a beautiful area indeed! He is excited about this Good News Way and he offers the invitation, “Hey you guys, Simon and Andrew – come here. James and John drop those nets, we’ve got bigger fish to fry” (or something like that). And they follow him. They took up the Good News Way.

Today. Now. It’s our time.

We need to help people understand what’s at stake, what choices there are.

It’s not narrow minded, dogmatic, judgmental Christianity, nor Godless secularism.

- For one don’t worry about God slapping your down,
- For another, don’t be fooled into believing you can enjoy life, without a divine foundation.

My friends – They are out there!

Seekers!

Questioners!

Questors!

Many of them, turned off by a narrow-minded, exclusivist Jesus, and many, by default, are turning to the red shiny bus declaration.

Be a Simon, and Andrew, a James, a John – and invite them into a way of life – that has an historic foundation, and a trustworthy authority – Jesus Christ.

My friends, you have an opportunity to make a difference in someone's life! Take hold of that Friend Day insert. March 21st Friend Day. The Invitation to a way of life is in your hands. Look at it.

- Make a list of your FRANS (no – it's not a misspelling). It's a way to remember – Friends, Relatives, Associates and Neighbors.
- Pray for them – those you list and believe the Good News of Christ will help. Offer the invitation – a start. A beginning.

Turn over the insert. Today. Now. Start your list. (I'm starting mine)

Friends, this could be the beginning of your changing the life of a friend!

Amen.