

Good news! . . . ???

I Corinthians 15

Easter

Peter Hiett

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Prayer

“Oh the wonderful cross.” That is such a weird thing to sing Lord God. It’s an instrument of death. And yet, Scripture refers to it as a tree. “Oh that wonderful cross.” Well, God, I pray that you’d help us to see something we haven’t seen, to believe something that we haven’t believed, to know something in a new way that we haven’t known or allowed ourselves to be known by. God, I pray that you would help us to see you this morning. In Jesus’ name, I pray that you would help us to preach.

Message

“Good News: He is risen!”

“Good news: He is risen!” That’s what we say on Easter. “Christ is risen,” but that’s one guy out of like one hundred billion since Adam. One in one hundred billion seems kind of small. But then we say, “Because He wins, you win!” Well, How good is He? What do we win?

Clip from *The Jerk*

[The scene takes place at a carnival with Steve Martin, the jerk, named Navin trying to get some folks to play his carnival game.]

Navin: *How about you sir! Step right up!*

Man: *Hey honey, let’s see how good this guy is.* [The man wins!] *Now, What’d I win?*

Navin: *Uh, anything . . . in this general area.*

[Navin shows the winners a shelf full of prizes like stuffed animals, a stereo, pens, etc. He points to an area below all that on a small portion of a lower shelf]

Navin: *Right in here, anything below the stereo, and on this side of the bicentennial glasses. Anything between the ashtray and the thimble! Anything in this three inches, right in here in this area, that includes the chicklets, but not the erasers.*

“Good news: You win! . . . EVERYTHING (in this area...)” anything to the right of Led Zepplin and the left of Joel Osteen, anything in this religious area that includes the choir robes, but not sex and Harry Potter. “You win! It’s free, totally and absolutely free, if you really believe, which means joining our thing and paying your dues.”

Sometimes Easter seems small. It doesn’t sound like news, but more like a sales pitch or even a threat.

"Good News: He is risen!" ...???

- **Is it small?**
- **Is it news?**
- **Is it Good?**

"Good news!" Well, is it small? Is it news? And is it good?

For some reason, I stumbled across this guy on the internet. Check it out.

Clip of Dan Barker at Atheist convention

Suppose you were walking by my house one day. You've been walking by for a long time and I were to go up on the porch and say,

"Hey! Stop! I've got some good news! Good news for you people! Stop stop stop!! You don't have to go down in my basement! This is great news! You've been walking by all this time. You've been ignoring me, and I deserve to be recognized and honored. And you've been ignoring me and it's made me so angry and so mad that I just get so horribly mad so I built this torture chamber down in the basement. And there are some hooks down there, and there are some sharp things, and there are some vats of sticky stuff. And there's a furnace, and there are some chains, and it's horrible and there are flames!

But you don't have to go down there! I sent my son down there... And it was gruesome; I tell you, it was really horrible. But that satisfied my anger and now his blood was shed, and now you're free. You don't have to go down. All you have to do, come on up here, just come up and tell my son that you love him and hug him and then you can move in with us. We'll live up in the attic and you can tell me how great I am. You can just tell me how much you love me and we'll do that. Won't that be great?"

... So, would you keep walking?

"So would you keep walking?"

Now, some of you are thinking, "Wow, at last, someone said it, and on Easter!" Some of you are disturbed, like I was disturbed. You're thinking, "Jesus did die for our sins." "And they were laughing." "And God is just." BUT ""Is that justice?" "Is that good news?" Well, some folks think that's the good news. I guess that's what Dan Barker, (the fellow in the video) thought was good news thirty-five years ago, when he was a pastor. Now he's an atheist, and I guess that was an Atheist convention, and they were laughing because they don't think that news is good news— because that God doesn't sound like a good God.

So, is God a blood thirsty, insecure deity who demands our loving affection with threats of torment in His basement? Is God *that* needy? Is God that co-dependent, neurotic, and narcissistic? ¹

Did God take Christ's life, on a tree, in a garden to feel better about us? Is God a taker? And would you, "Keep right on walking?" Well, . . . NO, not if you believed it was God; you would not keep walking— you'd go in! Not because you loved God, but because you would be terrified of God and his basement. You'd say, "I believe," but you wouldn't trust because that news isn't good news; it's a threat. You can't produce faith with threats. You can produce tithing units, but not faith, and faith means trust.²

Well, St. Paul believed that the resurrection of Jesus was just insanely good news.³

About twenty years after Jesus rose from the dead, Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians. In chapter 15, he reminds them of the good news. I would like to read most of it rather quickly, asking these questions:

"Good News: He is risen!" ...???

- **Is it small?**
- **Is it news?**
- **Is it Good?**

1 Corinthians 15: 1-2

*Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you,
"Gospel" means "Good News."⁴*

*which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are "being saved" if you hold
fast to the word I preached to you – unless you believed in vain . . .*

I think Paul will argue that "belief" – Faith – is not in vain.

Well, anyway, there is "*Good News*," and it's not dependent on you, or else it wouldn't really be "news." Yet, you are, "*being saved*" IF you "*believe*."

¹ Is God that different than Jesus, who loved His enemies and forgave those who persecuted Him?

² Now, if I thought I worked for God and I thought my church was the house of God, and I just wanted to get people in to fill the seats and to tithe, and go on the church mission trip, I might say just about what Dan Barker said. But honest people might laugh when I called it good news.

³ And I believe that what St. Paul wrote (that became the Bible) is true – everything he wrote about: God and Christ, and judgment, and wrath, and vessels of wrath, and even the underworld. I believe it's all true. But what he wrote about Easter, . . . I find hardest to believe. For, it seems too good to be true, but maybe it's so good it has to be true.

⁴ And you "*preach*" a gospel. You don't threaten, bargain or manipulate with a Gospel. That's why when Peter first preached the Gospel, the people had to ask, "What do we do? Because a Gospel isn't about what you need to do. It's about what someone else has done. "Preach" means "Proclaim, or Announce News."

It doesn't mean your faith creates the Good news, yet, your faith does mean you can enjoy the Good News now. And it doesn't mean Salvation is the result of believing, so much as Salvation is believing and believing is Salvation. So you are not simply, "saved" or not "saved." You are, "*being saved*" from "not believing." And it doesn't mean that if you don't believe now, you can never be saved.

Years ago, I took my kids for a ride on a giant banana, pulled behind a motorboat on the sea of Cortez.



Becky, second from the end, was terrified of sharks and, of course, at one point, we were flung into the sea. I swam to Becky, who was beginning to freak out a bit and I said, "Becky, Good News. I was a lifeguard in high school. Now do you confess that you need salvation? And do you believe that I can save you?" Well, she just yelled at me and didn't answer the question. That was her choice. So, I let her drown in the sea. We'll miss her, but the other kids feel better about their choice.

Actually, that didn't happen. But this did happen: When I tried to help Becky, she kept trying to climb me and stand on my head, away from all sharks. She tried to save herself, which was drowning me, which wouldn't be good for her. So, I pushed her away and began to yell, "Stop it! You just stop it!"

I pushed her away and poured out my wrath because I love her, and I don't want to lose her in the sea. That's my choice. When I was a lifeguard, I learned that large, frightened, drowning people will often seize control. They'll panic and try to take salvation, and so they can't receive salvation. So, to save them, you have to "not save them" but just watch them drown for a while. Then, when they've spent themselves and can no longer try to save themselves, you can save them and swim for them. While they're drowning, they're not being saved, they're being prepared to be saved. And when they are saved, they begin to trust their Savior, and then everyone can enjoy salvation and the giant banana ride.

You know even if you were a lifeguard with super powers, if a person thought they took salvation they couldn't receive salvation and know salvation or the joy of salvation or you, their savior.

Imagine if we were like, constantly saved, like every heartbeat was an absolute gift.

Imagine if we were constantly saved and just didn't know it . . .

Paul continues in 1 Corinthians 15: 3

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins.

Sin is “not believing” (not trusting). Not trusting, we took Christ’s life, trying to save our own. Yet, Christ gave His life so we would trust and be saved from “not believing.”

1 Corinthians 15: 3b – 6, Paul writes,

Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time . . .

Did you catch that? “*He appeared to the twelve*” . . . after he died, and before he appeared to the five hundred, which is before the disciples replaced Judas with Matthias. The resurrected Christ appeared to “the twelve,” yet one of the twelve had already sunk into the depths of the sea. Judas was dead and Jesus appeared to Judas. Wow!⁵

But make no mistake, Judas missed Easter . . . He took control, so couldn’t surrender control . . . and receive grace. He hung himself on a tree, before he could see that Jesus hung on a tree for him. Perhaps God shut the door, and let him drown for a while, in order that he might be saved. Whatever the case, Judas sent himself to the basement. (In many ways, he was already in the basement or the basement was in Judas.)⁶

Judas sent himself to the basement, . . . and Jesus went after him. That was *His* choice.⁷

Both Paul and Peter write that Jesus: “*descended into the depths of the earth.*”

[He] preached good news to the dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.” (Ephesians 4: 9, 1 Peter 4: 6)

In other words, Jesus preached and dead people believed.

And when people believe, they’re no longer the same.

Justice is not “People getting what they deserve, for people deserve nothing.”

Justice is “God getting what God deserves.

And God deserves people . . . made in His image.”

Justice is God, destroying faithlessness, and imparting faithfulness.

We’re justified – (that means *made right*) – by faith.

Well, anyway, Judas missed Easter, but Easter did not miss Judas.

Maybe Easter isn’t so small.

⁵ Jesus had said, “*An hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear – that is, the dead – will live.*” But, make no mistake, Judas missed Easter . . . and the cross. Scripture says he “repented” and he seemed to be so desperate to make things right, that he hung himself on a tree before he could see that Jesus hung on a tree for him. Jesus called him “*friend*.” And did you know? The money Judas made for betraying Jesus was used by the priests to buy the Potter’s Field in the valley of Gehenna, where Judas hung himself and died. The death of Jesus purchased that field. I’m just saying, don’t be surprised to find Jesus’ friend, Judas, in the New Jerusalem.

⁶ Maybe this world already is the basement. Scripture says this whole world lies in the power of the Evil One.

⁷ People ask about folks that have died before Easter or never heard of Easter. In the Old Testament, everyone goes to the basement to await judgment. Just before Jesus died, he said, “Now is the judgment.”

1Corinthians 15: 6-11

Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (Paul had been just like Judas . . . only, much worse.) But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach (Good News) and so you believed.

See? Our faith doesn't create the Good News.
The Good News creates our Faith.
The Good News is the Word of God.
And the "Word of God" creates all things . . . including faith.

THE "GOOD NEWS" ISN'T SMALL. IT'S RATHER BIG.

Now, 1Corinthians 15: 20- 26.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

First fruits means there will be more fruits. Believers are fruits. And Scripture says, even believers are "a kind" of first fruits, which anticipates even more fruits!

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

Not one, but two hundred billion and that's not advice, not a threat and not dependent on you. That's just News: REALLY BIG NEWS!

. . . as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

There are no enemies after that last enemy!

And the last enemy to be destroyed is death.

And check this out:

God's wrath is against the basement –

The faithless, hopeless, loveless, lifeless, empty place in the depths of the earth . . .

And the depths of your own heart.

God's wrath is against the basement.

God's wrath is not against Jesus . . . (except that), God bears His own wrath.

For Paul writes, *"God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself."*

And Jesus said, *"If you've seen me you've seen the Father."*

He is the Heart of the Father nailed to a tree.

The wrath of God is not against Jesus. It's more like the wrath of God *is* Jesus.

Do you remember what's poured from the bowls of wrath in the Revelation?

It's blood.

It must be the blood of the Lamb standing on the throne.

*"The **life** is in the blood."* It's the life of God.

The life of God is wrath upon the basement of death. Sometimes, it looks like an earthquake, sometimes a fire. Sometimes it looks like God, the Father, doesn't care, *but He does care.*

He's not destroying you.

He's destroying what you think is you.

He's destroying the basement.

He's saving you from your sin, your old self.

He's allowing you to drown in order that you might be saved.

He's allowing you to come to the end of your self, that you might see Him and trust Him.

Think with me:

Faith must be wrath upon faithlessness.

Hope must be wrath upon hopelessness.

Love must be wrath upon loveless-ness

Life must be wrath upon death.

Grace is certainly wrath upon sin.

And at the cross, the wrath of God poured out – poured out of Christ and into the depths of the earth, the basement. So, at the cross, the wrath of God is "accomplished" as the blood of Christ – the life of God – fills all things.

1 Corinthians 15: 27-28 (ESV)

For God has put all things in subjection under his feet. But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

Catch that? *"All in all."* It's very clear that Paul believed that through Christ God was in the process of filling all things. Which clearly implies this world is somehow empty; something is missing . . .

[Image of a lost child in the middle of a street]

What's missing in this picture? Well, this child looks lost.

This picture is missing "the way," and seeing this picture, we miss The Way.

[Image of Hitler addressing a crowd]

This picture may be missing some Truth.

[Image of a mass burial]

This picture of death makes us long for Life. So, what's missing in this picture? *"The Way, the Truth, and the Life."* And Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth and the life."*

[Image of a woman in a psyche ward]

A picture of insanity makes us yearn for reason. And Jesus is the Reason—the Logos of God. What's this picture missing? Well, for one thing: Color.

For years I prayed for a friend who'd been ritually abused, and Jesus would appear in her memories and heal them, and heal her. She (and also my wife) told me that these memories were all in black and white, for Satan only sees in "black and white." They were black and white until Jesus would appear. Then the memory would turn into a vision, a vision in living color, with a whole new meaning.

[Image of civil rights activists being beaten by security]

What's this picture missing? Beauty, Reason, the Way, the Truth, the Life. It's missing Love and "God is Love."

[Image of Dan Barker who served as an evangelical Christian preacher and musician for 19 years but left Christianity in 1984]

So what's missing, not in this picture, but in Dan Barker's picture of God?

GOD.

God is missing in Dan Barker's picture of God.

So this is Good News: The God that Dan Barker doesn't believe in – doesn't exist. And Dan Barker doesn't believe in that God because something in Dan Barker does believe in: Love, Light, beauty, Reason: "...the Way, the Truth, and the Life," the Good, and Jesus said, "God alone is good."

So this is really Good News: When you hope for "the good" you are hoping for God.

Good news: He will fill all things – including you, and including Dan Barker!

God destroys enemies by turning them into friends.

God fills all things:

Like Spirit or "breath" fills our lungs,
Like Blood pumped into dead tissue,
Like Life filling a corpse.

1 Corinthians 15: 35 – 40

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? (And) With what kind of body do they come?" You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body . . .

1Corinthians 15: 42-44

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. (That's an eternal body, full of eternal life.) It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

We tend to think Spirit is less real than matter. But Spirit created matter. When Jesus rose, He had: a body that ate fish, drank wine and could walk through walls – more real than the walls. And all His wounds had turned into beautiful scars, from shame into glory. He had a body that could commune with His bride in a way we can only begin to imagine, a body made for love, and a body no longer bound by space and time.

Paul writes, 1 Corinthians 15: 44b – 45

“If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, “The first man, Adam became a living being;” the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

Remember how it happened? Jesus, the last Adam, hung on a tree in a garden, cried, “*It is finished*,” and delivered up his Spirit.

Pay close attention to Scripture, and I think you’ll see that:

- “*The tree of the knowledge of good and evil*” and “*the tree of life*,” (both in the middle of the garden) are one tree.
- And the tree in the garden, where Christ was crucified, is also that tree.
- As is the tree of life in the New Jerusalem.

Adam, (that’s Hebrew for “*mankind*”), takes “*the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil*” from that tree to make himself in the image of God. We take the law (that’s the knowledge of good and evil) to justify ourselves. We take the Life of Love, kill the Life of Love, turn Him into laws and then only see in black and white.

We take Christ’s life on the tree . . . and everything dies.

But Christ gives His life on the tree . . . and everything lives.

The cross is a *giving* Tree that we thought was a *taking* tree.

There are certain things that cannot be taken. They can only be received.

If love is taken, we call it “rape,” and we don’t know love.

If love is given and received, we call it “life” . . . and sometimes, “a baby.”

If life is taken, we call it “murder.”

But if life is given, we call it “sacrificial love,” or “grace.”

God didn’t *take* Christ’s life on the tree . . .

He gave Christ’s life on the tree . . .

We took Christ’s life on the tree . . .

So, who is the bloodthirsty, insecure deity . . . who tries to take love with threats? Who is that needy, co-dependent, neurotic and narcissistic? Who is the taker? We are the takers.

At the cross, we *took* the life of love . . . And God *gave* the life of love. And now we know “the Good and the evil.” God, *the giver*, is good . . . and *the taker* is evil.

But here’s great news: God, in Christ, gave His life long before we took His life.

Sometimes people ask, “Why did Christ have to die on the tree?”

Well . . . He didn’t have to die on the tree.

God doesn’t have to do anything . . .

But He *wants* to do everything (that’s anything).

God didn’t have to create anything . . .

He *wants* to create everything.

He’s not “*needy*.” He’s the *giver*, the absolute giver.

He is love and Jesus is His Word.

And Jesus said, “*No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.*” When Jesus delivered up His Spirit, He delivered up God’s Spirit, the Holy Spirit. He became “*a life-giving Spirit.*” God is the Life-Giving Spirit. And He gave himself according to *his* eternal plan. God the Father and God the Son gave according to *their eternal plan*. They said, “*Let us make...*” and they gave because they wanted to.

This week, I was reminded of one of my children’s favorite books. “The Giving Tree.” They thought it was Good News. It’s about a tree that loved a boy . . . and a boy that loved a tree. But, when the boy gets older, he takes the fruit, and sells it for money so he can be happy. Older still, he cuts the tree’s branches and builds himself a house so he can be happy.

Still not happy, he cuts down the trunk to build a boat and sail away so he can be happy. Then . . . after a long time . . . he comes back very tired. The tree says, “Come boy, sit down and rest.” He does and the tree is happy . . . and the boy is happy . . . The End.

The cross is the Giving Tree that we thought was the Taking Tree. But don’t feel guilty for the taking; feel grateful for the giving. You need to understand: It’s all according to plan.

God chose to reveal His love for us.
And thereby create us,
So together, we would rest and be happy.
The End is the Beginning.

1 Corinthians 15: 45-53

Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being;” the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. I tell you this, brothers: flesh (my flesh takes life and eats it) and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we

shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

Must! Did you hear that? “*Must.*”

Easter is not an option – It’s not your choice. It’s God’s choice. “*His Word will not return void.*”

1 Corinthians 15: 53-57

For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory.” (The sting of death is sin. Sin is trying to take God’s life, and the power of sin is the law. The law describes God’s life.) But thanks be to God, who gives (God gives His life and his name is Jesus.) us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

“*This is the victory that overcomes the world*” writes John, “our faith.” And “*thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” By giving Love, God creates our Faith in Love . . . and that faith is not in vain. That faith changes us, and everything. It is the capacity to receive Love and give Love.

For Christmas, Becky gave me a book titled *The Giver*. I read the book and then I saw the movie. Jonas is a boy who lives in a futuristic dystopian society. At first, it looks pleasant, but gradually you realize something is missing: . . . No one dances. There is no music. They reproduce, but no one makes love . . . and everything is in black and white.

It turns out that the elders had outlawed the memory of love, for love is hard to control and with love comes pain. They reasoned that when people have a choice, they always choose wrong, and that’s true. But love is not our choice. It’s *God’s choice* born in us and then, rising in us. And yes, learning love does hurt . . .but *living in love* is ecstasy.

Well, they took love and turned into law. They knew *about* love, but outlawed the experience of love. They built a high-tech wall around their city, to protect the city from the memory of love. Yet, the society has a receiver, who remembers love in order to gain wisdom and advise the others. Jonas is picked to become the new receiver of “memories.” The old receiver gives “the memories” to the new receiver through touch. When Jonas remembers Love, he comes to know his society is evil. The old receiver (played by Jeff Bridges) and Jonas, the new receiver, come up with a plan to give what they’ve received, to everyone: the memory of love.

It’s science fiction, so of course, it’s silly. Jonas will sacrifice his life so the people can remember love. Jonas will break down the wall – the barrier to love. And this is what happens:

Clip from *The Giver*

[The scene opens inside a library with Jeff Bridges, the old receiver, now the giver, reaching for the new receiver and the new receiver holding the old giver's arms under the sleeves of his coat.]

The Giver-Robert: (Clears throat) *Well, I love you, Jonas.*

(Jonas smiles gently, looking in the old giver's eyes and the old receiver starts to chuckle softly)

There it is. You have the courage, let me give you the strength.

The Receiver-Jonas: *Can I ju . . .*

[The receiver takes in a quick breath, closes his eyes and tilts his head back as the Giver suddenly grabs the young receiver's arms and images flash in his mind as his eyes close.]

The following images of people of all nationalities and walks of life flash into his mind:

- A cliff jumper jumping off a cliff above a river
- A man leading a camel across a desert
- A man putting a stick in a hole and spinning it rapidly to start a fire
- Sled dogs pulling a sled through the snow
- A kayaker going down rapids
- A car speeding around a curving road
- A man in Tiananmen square facing a moving tank
- People praying at the wailing wall
- A woman facing soldiers in riot gear
- Soldiers spraying a crowd with a fire hose
- Soldiers with riot sticks grabbing protesters who are holding on to each other
- A man pointing and grabbing a gun in a line of soldiers hands
- A woman with an open hand and a flower facing a line of soldiers with bayonets
- An oriental man carrying a child with police pointing him away
- The Berlin wall, people tearing down the Berlin wall with crowbars
- A young crying woman holding on to a scared policeman in riot gear
- A clergyman in front of a row of police in riot gear arm raised in blessing
- Arabic mob protesting, arms raised in a fist
- A man in a balaclava kneeling on one knee and holding his hands out in peace signs
- A white man holding his fist up facing a mob of men in riot gear and carrying sticks
- Someone holding up fingers in a peace sign in a dark night march
- A young man holding up an arm as he's being sprayed with water
- Mohammed Ali holding up his arms in victory as a mob in celebration picks him up
- A black woman raising her fist in a protest march
- Nelson Mandela holding his fist up and smiling

Clip from *The Giver* continues

The scene fades into the young receiver riding a bike on a dark bridge and down a road at night]

Female elder's voice over a loud speaker: *Attention all community residents. The receiver in training has been reported missing from his dwelling*

[The night turns to morning as the receiver continues to ride. The Giver is in a building and he faces a meeting of the elders]

The Giver: *With love come faith and with faith comes hope!*

Female elder: *Robert, That's just passion that can turn. It turns into...*

Giver: *We can't...*

Female elder: (speaking over Robert–The Giver) *Contempt. And murder.*

Giver: *We could choose better.*

Female elder: (laughs derisively) *People are weak. People are selfish! When people have the freedom to choose, they choose wrong. Every single time.*

The Giver: *We are living a life of shadows, of echoes of faint distant whispers of what once made us real!*

[The scene shifts to the young receiver sledding down a hill with his brother wrapped in a blanket, in his arms, and watching in amazement as a wave of light washes over the snow covered hills. As Jonas continues down the hill he sees cement pillars. A protective shield is exposed as Jonas crosses the border of the protected society he's been living in. As he moves into the outer world the protective shield rolls back passes and everything it passes turns from black and white to color. The isolated society turns from black and white to color.

The scene transitions to the old giver standing in the elders' meeting and sensing that change is upon the community. All the elders are shown in the meeting hall. They stand or sit in silence, a bit in awe, as their world progressively changes and all the images–memories that were imparted to Jonas are now imparted to the entire community.

The memories move and change rapidly. The elder woman is shown in black and white, which is gradually changing to color. Multiple beautiful, joyful, and life giving scenes fill the hearts and memories of the entire community. The scene pans over the town- now in vivid color.

The scenes returns to the young receiver on his sled – in color- coming to stop in front of a lodge, in the woods, as a girl's voice singing rings out.

Receiver: *The giver - had led us here - to this house.* (The house is lit with Christmas lights) *It was real.* (The girl continues singing "Silent night.")

It's silly, but it reminds me of Easter: His shadow world is flooded with the knowledge of Love, and not dead love, but living Love: music, beauty, truth and life . . . it's his old world, but now filled and in living color.

He arrives at a house containing something the Giver had helped him to remember: In the house, there is a tree, and under the tree, there are gifts. It's a *giving* tree. It's Christmas. On Christmas the angel said, "*Behold Good News of great joy that will be for all the people.*" On Easter, the Good News conquered "death and hell."

Good news: God is "the Giver" and God is "the Good" and He's giving Himself.

And more Good News: Once you receive Him, you receive all things with Him.

And more Good News: He even gives takers the capacity to receive:
At His tree. He turns takers into receivers,
Who receive what He gives,
Who then begin to give like the Giver.
And as the Giver said, *"It's more happy to give than receive."*

So, Good News: Christ is Risen!
Is it small?

"Good News: He is risen!" ...???

- Is it small? **NO!**
- Is it news?
- Is it Good?

NO! It's literally, everything.
Is it news?

"Good News: He is risen!" ...???

- Is it small? **NO!**
- Is it news? **YES!**
- Is it Good?

YES! It's not dependent on you, but you are utterly dependent on it.

Is it Good?

"Good News: He is risen!" ...???

- Is it small? **NO!**
- Is it news? **YES!**
- Is it Good? **ABSOLUTELY!**

ABSOLUTELY! It is Goodness Himself.

Do I believe it? . . . Yes . . . and No! I'm *"being saved."* I DO believe and I DON'T believe.
I know that I WILL believe...
But when I do believe, now –

It changes every situation now.
It changes the way I look at people.
It changes the way I treat people.
It changes the way I forgive people.
It changes the way I worship God.
It changes *me* . . . when I believe.

So Paul finishes: 1 Corinthians 15: 57b – 58

[God] gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

[Peter turns around and looks at the cross, which is covered in bright cloths in celebration of Easter.]

Hey, Look! There's a tree.

Communion

And Jesus took bread and broke it saying, *"This is my body given to you; take and eat."* And having given thanks, He took the cup saying, *"This is the new covenant in my blood poured out for the fore-giveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you and – do this as often as you drink. Do it in memory of me."* And *"...in this is love."*

We invite you to join us at the Lord's Table. If you don't want to come now – you don't have to. But if you want to, tear a piece of the bread, dip it in the cup (dark is wine, light is juice). Take the Good News because He's given the Good News. Then receive the Good News, and eat it.

Prayer

So Lord, God, you are good! I mean, I always want good stuff, and I'm complaining about not getting good stuff, . . . and You're the Good! You're the good in everything and you're the Good to me. Lord Jesus I thank you that you're showing us that you are good. And Lord God, I thank you that nothing is more powerful than the good. Not even me! That's good news. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Benediction

And so by way of benediction, I'll say what I always say, and that is: "Believe the Gospel." But now, I hope you understand what I'm saying a little better because it's not just me saying it.

Gospel means, "Good News" and "believe" is in the imperative tense. I didn't say, "Hey, you *could* believe the good news," or "I *hope* you believe the good news," or "you *might* believe the good news." I said, "*Believe* the good news." It's a command! And it's not even my command. It's the command of the Creator. It will happen! But, you might as well let it happen – today! And then you can join the party. In Jesus' name, believe the gospel, Amen.

Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.