

381 Round in circles: 'What is the good news?'

For seven years, I've been going round in circles, with similar material recurring. But in my defence, after coming to faith in 1968, I spent 50 years being told (and telling others) a distorted version of 'the gospel'. It takes a lot of unlearning, to re-find the good news that turned the world upside down in the first century. Unlearning is difficult and unsettling!

So, what IS the good news?

First, it's a story about something that actually happened, something momentous, something that God did (and *is doing* – it's a continuing story) to rebuild a place where God and humans can live in a loving, faithful relationship.

God started with Abraham – presumably he seemed teachable – and, over the centuries, God worked with, in and through various (fallible) people, encouraging them to write about what happened, and to write other types of literature expressing their relationship with God. To create a platform from which to launch the next dramatic stage, God inspired them to write things of huge future significance.

Then God came to earth. (A short sentence, so loaded with meaning!) What actually happened is recorded for us, saying repeatedly that this took place in fulfilment of 'what was written in the Scriptures'. Because it was all predicted in (their) Bible, it gave the early believers confidence that they weren't just making this up. Yes, God did come as a baby, did love people, teach people, heal people. Jesus was murdered, did die, but then reappeared in bodily form – recognisable, though somehow 'different'.

Jesus then disappeared (back to the Father in heaven) and sent the Holy Spirit to actually be IN people, inspiring them to amazing acts of love and self-sacrifice. The Spirit took Jesus' words and helped the disciples to understand that the final stage of the story is that God will fully and finally return to earth, we will be judged (i.e. any nasty self-harming and others-harming bits will be purged away), so we will then care for each other and for the earth, with no more tears or pain – and no death – and we'll freely worship God. Wow!

Well, that's more like it, I think, than 'the gospel' we were all fed. But this real good news won't fit into a small tract, or into a 'guest service' – it takes time to appreciate and to see how it works out in our everyday lives, constantly learning as the Spirit guides us.

And to help us, we have (a) evangel-ists – no, not 'persuaders' – people good at relating this amazing multi-millennial story, and (b) a story-telling cycle.

In the church's year, we concentrate on different aspects of this amazing story, with two main 'party seasons' – Christmas and Easter. Then from Pentecost to Advent we concentrate on how to put it into practice in our daily lives, with Advent linking the glorious ending (Jesus returning to earth) with the breath-taking beginning: Emmanuel, 'God with us'. How different and how glorious is *this* good news!

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