

The bad news of Jesus Christ



The starting point for a better way of witnessing or evangelism may not be building a better dogma or a new methodology, but letting go.

Iwonder if it would be helpful to begin by letting go. Let go of everything we know to do with evangelism. Let go of the word. Let go of any sense of duty or pressure we feel internally or externally to share our faith. Let go of what we don't like. Let go of oughts. Let go or perhaps name our own woundedness, where we have experienced or perhaps found ourselves involved in coercive, dominating or manipulative ways of sharing with people that have proved damaging. Let go of the shame. Let go of outcomes. Let go of the gospel. Let go of the bad news of Jesus Christ. Just let it all go. And breathe.

That process might take a few years.

I should probably qualify what I mean by the "bad news". It's a phrase I picked up from Randy Woodley, who is a First Nations writer and theologian. He says that indigenous people in North America mostly heard the gospel as the bad news of

Jesus Christ. It was bad for multiple reasons, which included having to lose their identity for that of the dominant settler culture; trading a worldview that cherished the land and community for a system based on greed and the individual; being required to accept their demise as those meant to be colonised. We might not have experienced that level of trauma, but we recognise what he is talking about.

Then, perhaps, when we are ready, if we want to, we can take a fresh look at the life of Jesus Christ and begin to rebuild a faith that is honest and authentic. Something that we are completely comfortable and at home in because it is founded on love. A faith that is held in communities that are radically hospitable and free of judgement, that embody the life of Jesus Christ, where all are welcome. Communities where there is an at-homeness because the way things are done is not foreign or imposed, but is done from the inside of our culture with imagination and freedom. Where evangelism, whether or not we call it that (I don't), is natural conversation sharing in friendship about what has been life changing for us, with no pressure of expected outcomes.

That rebuilding will also take a few years.


It strikes me that this is a process Jesus went through. He took around 18 years to do it – that is if we assume he began around aged 12 and was only ready to share his take on faith aged 30. He let go. He worked out that the purported good news about God was actually bad news for a lot of people,

“People loved Jesus, flocked to him, because he was good news”

especially those at the fringes, even though they went along with it. There were a lot of rules, a lot of control, a lot of taxation, and a lot of sacrifice. Those rules contained laws about who was clean and who was unclean, purity codes, who was in and out with a whole category of people deemed sinners who were excluded. The Temple authorities in Jerusalem who held a lot of power, colluding with the Roman Empire, did rather well out of the system. This all worked together rather nicely to keep people in their place. It's powerful stuff when presented with God on your side in the equation, an old trick that we are seeing played out in our world at the moment. Jesus lets it all go.

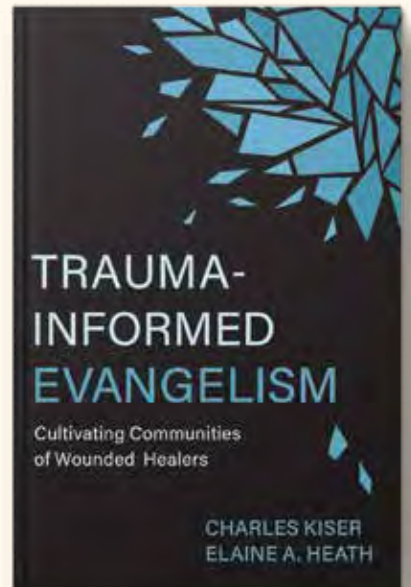
Somehow through reading, digging deep into the tradition, prayer, imagination, perhaps conversations late into the night with his cousin John, he begins to rebuild. When he arrives on the scene aged 30, he has worked out his honest, authentic take, founded on love. He has done so by going back to the heart of the tradition and breaking it open in fresh ways. When he is invited to preach in his home town, he reads from Isaiah 61 and announces that God's kingdom, as he calls it, is about good news for those who have been excluded or are at the edges through poverty, ill health, and the oppression of empire. He gets specific about the inclusion of foreigners, those deemed unclean by the religion of the day, to the degree that people want to throw him off a cliff. And he announces jubilee: a new day which God is in favour of, where there is freedom of slaves, rest for land, and economic justice. He leaves out the verse about vengeance. The God of Jesus is not violent or vengeful like the God of Empire but is a God of love and freedom. He quite quickly incenses the religious authorities by breaking their laws, healing people on the sabbath, touching the unclean, eating with the wrong people, transgressing the laws of who is in and out showing that all are welcome, telling stories that flip the script. He embodies this new reality, new kingdom.

There are other texts that show Jesus' alternative lens. One where he repeats to the pharisees more than once the line from Hosea that God requires mercy not sacrifice. Another is that the heart of the law is to love God and love neighbour and everything else hangs on that. Unsurprisingly, we read that the people love Jesus, talk about him, flock to him and bring people to him. Why? Because he was good news – simple as that. People are not stupid.

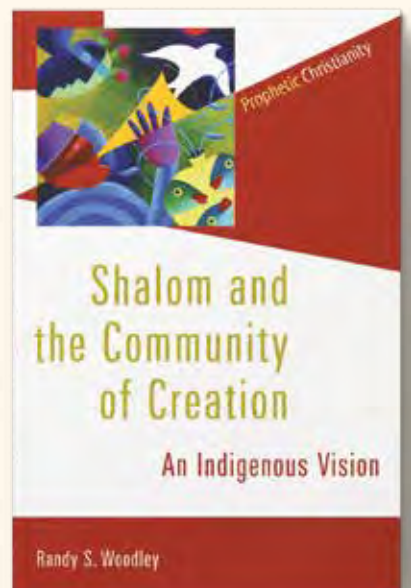
Ethical evangelism might simply require the courage to trust your instincts and go on such a journey. There's no method. If you want to dig deeper into this, I wholeheartedly recommend reading the book *Trauma-Informed Evangelism*. There are lots of people interested in hearing about faith at the moment, who do not carry any of this baggage. They don't know about Jesus and have not been wounded by church experience. For them, we can simply begin with the re-storied faith that is good news, which we can share in natural ways. 

Good News Bibliography

Want to go deeper? Jonny recommends these books:



Trauma Informed Evangelism (2023) by Charles Kiser and Elaine Heath



Shalom and The Community of Creation (2012) by Randy Woodley