

***CRIBB<S>NOTE - October 12, 2008***

There is good news in bad news situations. When it seems things are falling apart, we are encouraged not to give up. That is not always easy. Last week we heard the horrible story about a local man who could not take it anymore and he murdered his entire family before committing suicide. He left notes throughout his home detailing his frustration and lost hope as the nation's economic crisis swept over his life and he decided to end it all. It is the worse kind of news when a family is destroyed because things go so terribly wrong.

We need not become Pollyannaish in our outlook pretending things aren't so bad. People are actually living through a crisis. While many families have suffered a protracted period of hardship, others are joining the ranks of the discouraged, dispirited, and discarded. Significant shifts in circumstances make it nearly unbearable to keep going. Yet, go on we must.

One of the cruel tricks played on too many of us is the notion that we are to live as if we are "rugged individuals." False scenarios are presented that suggest our singular strength can prevail against all obstacles. That is a form of idolatry that betrays our humanity and places us in the desperate state of lost hope when reality takes its toll. What we actually need to know and practice is our ability to forge community and inject unyielding love and care for our families, neighbors and selves. The basis of such a model of being is by imitating God's love for humanity. We must know 'it is never about me, rather, it is we' who must join together in the glorious search for salvation and liberation.

In his letter to the fledging community in Philippi nearly two thousand years ago, the Apostle Paul wrote flowery words to urge the people to look after each other even as they faced conflicts. The short book of Philippians is a brief love letter filled with practical instructions and a mega-dose of inspiration. Amid their bad situation, Paul offered good news. There is irony in the subtlety of Paul's letter.

The letter is written from prison where Paul was facing death because of his uncompromising challenge of the empire. He wrote during a period of profound threat and hardship. It was not a time of celebration and happiness. He delved into the inner core of his personal reservoir to discover a depth of faith in God through Christ to pen what he felt the people of Philippi needed to read. He presented good news in a bad news situation.

We are called today to follow the path of Paul. Surrounded by numerous reminders of broken promises and acts of gross crimes on a grand scale, the people of God today must proclaim a better way that unites humanity beyond temporal claims of selfish interests. Everywhere there is a need for good news. Paul understood that was the case as he reached beyond his prison cell to touch a beloved community. His epistle remains relevant as we need to know how to be present ourselves as helpful companions on this journey.

It is not always necessary to provide the right answers during crises. It is important to stand in the breach and extend compassion and retention of our common humanity.

Paul reminded his readers to live a "praiseworthy life" that honors God by demonstrating hope, love, mercy, and peace. "Peace beyond understanding" is what so many people are seeking. God is still speaking. We are listening so we can be equipped to spread good news in bad news situations.