

Fill Up
December 5, 2010
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“Neighbors angry over KKK Snowman,” “House hunters are too scared to buy,” “22 killed in forest fire in Israel,” “Death penalty in home invasion killings,” “Man, linked to publicist's death, kills self,” “Death in the town that Disney built,” “Britney denies abuse...”¹

Anger, fear, untimely death in a variety of ways, and some question of abuse... these are some of the themes of one day's worth of national headlines from one web site this last week. Anger, fear, death, abuse...it is not good news, is it?

And we hear things like it every time we turn on a radio or TV, or open up a newspaper or website. It can happen in our personal lives, too, in any number of ways. We are often surrounded by messages of gloom and struggle and strife, and it can really run you down if you let it. It is all too easy to get drained and lose hope.

Intriguingly, on the same day at other websites there were some very different headlines being offered. Here are some of those: “Cost of TARP Bailout *Plummets*, From \$700 Billion to Just \$25Billion,” “Boy, 5, *Donates Life Savings* to Help Rebuild Burned Fire Station,” “Hundreds of Unknown Picasso Works Discovered in Paris,” “Scientist Lives With Endangered Tribe to Save Disappearing Language...”²

There are some very different themes at play in this listing of headlines. Unexpected economic *good news*; *radical generosity* on the part of a very young person; a surprising find of important artwork; and human beings working to preserve something *essentially and uniquely human*—these are all forms of good news, indeed *very good news*. And it doesn't stop there; hear some more good news:

“Study Concludes Africa Can Feed Itself Within Generation,”³ “Toddler walks two blocks to reach medical help for her father,” “Miracle mum brings premature baby son back to life with two hours of loving cuddles after doctors pronounce him dead.”⁴

¹ From the cnn.com main page, December 2, 2010.

² From the goodnewsnetwork.org, December 2, 2010.

³ From happynews.com, December 1, 2010.

⁴ From goodnewsdaily.com, December 2, 2010.

An entire continent that has struggled long to become sustainable is on the road to self sufficiency. A little person demonstrates a capacity to help her parent in a time of dire need. A mother demonstrates exactly how love can overcome *even death*.

Sometimes it seems like all the world has to offer is anger, fear and death. Often these are the events that steal the headlines. And sometimes it can be enough to really bring you down, and deplete your spiritual gas tank. Yet even in the midst of all the bad news that the world so often offers, there is good news, too. When we are lucky we can find the occasional website, or newspaper, or moment when we hear or experience it clearly. And we are gifted with other ways to latch on to good news, too.

In fact *that is what church is all about*. This is the place where we fill up our spiritual gas tanks when the world has run them down. This is the place that we sift through the rubble of the world's bad news to find the shining jewels of good, even *very good* news. And that is exactly what Paul is sharing with the Romans in this morning's reading. Paul is reminding them of all the places that hope abounds, even when life can be trying or worrying, or seemingly deadly.

We can find hope in our own tenacious clinging to it. As Christians we are called to seek out hope and to embrace it with our whole beings. This is what Paul means by being steadfast. Hope is also on parade throughout scripture, all of which tells the story of how God turns even the worst that life offers to the best possible ends. Sure, Jesus was crucified—but let us never, ever, ever lose sight of the Resurrection! And there is another wellspring of hope: Christ himself, who is our guide, our Lord and our brother, who knows from the inside what it is to be human.

So, the next time you hear some bad news—or might just be caught up in some, recite a favorite Bible verse or two to balance yourself out, or phone a fellow church member for a word of encouragement, or just invite God into that moment to remember what is really at work in the world. Not just on the surface, *but at the heart of life*. Remember that life and love and hope get the last word. And “(m)ay the God of hope *fill you* with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁵ In this Advent season, and every time you need to, come to God, fill up on hope, and go forth in peace!

Amen?

⁵ Romans 15:13

Romans 15:4-13

4For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.

5May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, 6so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. 8For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, 9and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, “Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name”; 10and again he says, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people”; 11and again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him”; 12and again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope.”

13May the God of hope *fill you* with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.