



COURAGE TO BE THE GOOD NEWS

By Ken Robinson

Another day in 2022. Another day of grim headlines – a gruesome war in Ukraine with massive global impacts, the threat of a potential global war and daily accounts of unthinkable horrors, leaving us emotionally bruised and lost for solutions; new Covid variants; lockdowns; bushfires; floods; tornados; earthquakes; dire predictions of even more severe natural phenomena; shortages of crucial supplies; inflation; interest rates rising; electricity prices soaring; and so on it goes. Actually there have been three plus years of grim headlines going back to the bushfires of mid-2019.

I have observed a heaviness of spirit. People are weary of the grim prospects in so many aspects of life. Scarcely a week goes by without some news that brings horror, or anger, or sadness, or fear. Leaders, media and ordinary folk are regularly trying to switch the landscape of news and emotions to one of optimism, normality, and care, but declarations that normality has returned are regularly overturned by the next news cycle.

And now we are in the season of Advent, when our society celebrates Christmas with gifts, parties and holidays, and Christians celebrate the Good News of the birth of Jesus in a manger, the coming of Christ to lead us into God's kingdom.

As Christians we have good news to share; messages of love, hope and peace. What chance is there that our good news will be heard in the noise and crush of Christmas? Certainly the grim news will continue to make the headlines. But we have hope to offer the world. We know God has many forces at work, of which we are a small part. Our calling is to support the forces for good and to be in the forefront of such movements when we can. But what about in our everyday living? The extraordinary busy-ness of Christmas ensures that few will have energy or disposition to listen to speeches or messages about our Good News.

When people are under pressure, perhaps bordering on crisis for some, the Spirit's touch is more readily received. The challenge to us as followers of Christ is perhaps simpler than we imagine. It might seem we have to be even busier than others to do all the usual family preparations, and find ways to witness. I believe we are called to be a little less busy and to intentionally take time to be quiet, to meditate and pray. It is a time to draw closer to God and to pray, "God, where will your Spirit lead me today?" As we take time to be aware of the beauty of creation and God's love for us and the world, we may be surprised where the Spirit will lead us. Often to familiar people and places where there is need, but sometimes far from familiar territory.

Exactly at this time of the year in 2017 I was preparing a Christmas worship service and was deeply touched by God's love for all of us. In that moment a person's name came to me. I had met this lady briefly, a couple of times that year. She is the sister-in-law of a Chinese-

Australian I know in Perth, but she lives in Sydney. Over the next 24 hours the awareness of God's love for her kept coming to me. It was so insistent that I felt I must email and tell her of God's love for her. It turned out she was in the middle of an agonising dilemma, considering a major decision for her and her family. We emailed back and forth several times that next day. At the end of that time she and her family made the decision to leave their Chinese Christian church, where they had been members for many years, and join a local Anglican church where she would lead the outreach to Chinese seekers in the area. She had needed some confirmation from God to make such a momentous move. Neither she nor I will ever forget this amazing experience. We will always be friends in Christ.

Consider for a moment how God has touched and blessed your life. Perhaps you've had the experience of being blessed beyond anything you expected or felt you deserved? Perhaps, like the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears, you have experienced forgiveness that couldn't be earned? Perhaps your life has been directed down paths you couldn't have imagined? These are some examples of God's extravagant generosity, love and gentle guidance.

Perhaps we can prepare ourselves not so much to tell the Good News, but to be the Good News? Perhaps you will find an opportunity to meet someone's need? They may not have even asked you. Consider all that you can give generously. It could be money. But it could be time and presence. It could be an item that you have that someone needs. It could be knowledge and understanding without which they cannot resolve something. It could be flowers or food from your garden. Such loving generosity will not be missed. It will be 'heard'. A small touch of Christ through your hands will resonate with the receiver. He or she will know they have been visited by that which is good.

Strangely it won't weaken you. Giving to another out of love leaves you feeling strengthened yourself, though you may be tired for a time, or financially poorer, or still having tasks undone on your 'to do' list. If you have opportunity to be the Good News the other will 'listen'. They will know they have been touched by goodness. Goodness – love, generosity, forgiveness, appreciation, a shoulder to lean on – is not forgotten. It breeds hope and stirs a desire to do likewise. That desire opens wider the door to God's love and the Good News.

So this Advent season I pray you will find time to contemplate, to focus on Jesus Christ, and to pray: "God, where will your Spirit lead today? Help me be fully awake and ready to respond. Grant me the courage to risk something new and become a blessing of your love and peace. Amen."

Perhaps the Spirit will lead you to be Good News! Now that is what Christmas is about!