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# From the Pastor's Desk

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## *What's Good about Good News?*

Most of us know that the word gospel literally means “good news.” The Greek word in the New Testament is euangelion, which means “good message” (note the word angel, or “messenger” in there). That word got translated by way of Old English God (good) spell (message). Good News is simply what the word gospel means. So it's odd how hard it is to figure out the ways that the word gospel is used today. They generally have nothing at all to do with good news.

There's gospel music, for instance. It's a musical genre, a category at the Emmy awards. Here, gospel refers mostly to a style of music, originally African-American, later just Southern church music. It is melodic, passionate, and has a strong emphasis on rhythm. Gospel music can be slow and mournful or rousing and enthusiastic, and often the words are uplifting, but the words aren't the point. When you say music is gospel or has a gospel feel, you're talking about style and rhythm, not good news.

Then there's gospel preaching. Now, you would think that this would connect to the original meaning of “good news,” but again in this case, gospel refers to a style rather than to any particular substance. Gospel preaching generally refers to preaching that is loud, passionate, angry, and especially vehement in condemning sin. A gospel preacher loosens his tie, rolls up his sleeves, stomps around the pulpit, waves a Bible, and flings sweat to the third row of pews. There will generally be some good news in the course of the message – that Christ died for our sins – but again, that message isn't what defines gospel preaching. As with gospel music, it's more about style.

Some also speak about “sharing the gospel.” This sounds more promising. But when you hear that phrase, what picture comes to mind? For my part – and this may be my Southern evangelical background – I picture people at street corners or at your front door, wielding gospel tracts and assuring you that unless you follow the formula that they're about to present and pray the prayer printed on the back page of the tract, you will most certainly burn in hell. Maybe it's just me – but I don't think it is – but this doesn't feel like good news.

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All these uses of the word gospel have a connection with the good news of the New Testament, but all of them have moved the good news into the background and instead focused on a certain style. Gospel music and gospel preaching both involve foot stomping. Gospel preaching and “sharing the gospel” both involve threatening people.

I think this is why we Methodists the past few decades have been so bad at evangelism. Evangelism is telling good news, the gospel, and most of what we associate with the word gospel is not good news. In September, I will begin a sermon series that aims to strip away the threats and the arrogance and the stylistic touches and uncover what really is good news and how we are to communicate good news in a way that doesn't obscure its message.

Because – and I can't believe I have to say this – the good news actually is good.