

February 2013, *Equipping* #133

“Bringing good news. Of great joy. For all people.”



Tim Froese
Executive Minister, Witness
Mennonite Church Canada

As we look ahead into the uncertainty of 2013, we may do so with some apprehension and perhaps fear. After all, our hearts and minds continue to reel at the violence, injustice and pain that humanity is capable of, whether by individuals, governments, or societies. Sandy Hook, Tar Sands, Syria, New Delhi gang rape, and indigenous/non-indigenous relations in Canada are just some of the many stories that elicit strong feelings, complex histories, and unfortunately, pain and death. We may also enter 2013 with an eager search, a need for newness, and the hope that newness will bring change, that ultimately newness will be good.

Although Christmas has passed, my ears still hear the echo of the angel’s words to the shepherds: “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.” (Luke 2:10) The biblical command to “not be afraid” is so frequent that we may forget to recall these words precisely at the times we need to listen the most: when fear, apprehension or even pessimism are present. And the reason given by the angel for not fearing is perhaps more challenging to believe in our world today. Can we really believe that bringing good news (literally *to evangelize*) will generate GREAT joy for ALL people? Sadly, few today would associate evangelism with “great joy” or that it is for “all people.”

One of the tragedies in the western church is that there is a notion and practice of “evangelizing” that finds little basis in the biblical text. In fact, you will not find the word in our English Bible, even though it’s Greek equivalent is found 55 times(!) in the New Testament. Here are a few samples of the rich content the New Testament evangelists considered good news. As you reflect on them consider their capacity to bring great joy to all people:

- Gabriel the angel/evangelist told Zechariah: “[John the Baptist] will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” (Luke 1:16-17)
- John the Baptist/evangelist told the crowds: [to those claiming to be God’s people] “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance...Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same, ...[to those in positions of financial power] Don’t collect any more than you are required to”...[and to those in military power] “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.” (Luke 3:8,11,13,14)
- Jesus the Messiah/evangelist told those gathered for worship, the fulfillment of these words: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” (Luke 4:18,19)
- Paul the apostle/evangelist wrote to the insiders and outsiders of the Ephesian congregations: “At that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility... His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God...” (Eph. 2:12-16)

May this year find you reaching beyond your fears to receive and share this good news. And in doing so, may you and all people experience great joy.