

“Good Tidings We Bring”

Sermon – January 25, 2026 Stone Presbyterian Church

“Good tidings we bring to you and your kin! Good tidings for Christmas and a happy New Year!”

You, of course, recognize that as the closing line to the carol, “We Wish You a Merry Christmas.” And it is also likely the only time you use the words “tidings” or “kin.” Both of them are very old words going back over 800 years with roots even further back, but today we use them intentionally as old-fashioned words.

“kin” means a relative, someone from your family or clan. You probably know it from words like “kinfolk”, “kinship” or “akin.”

“tidings” means “news”, “information”, or “announcement.”

Now, you may be thinking, “Didn’t the Christmas season end on Epiphany two weeks ago and aren’t we in the fourth week of the New Year?”

The answer is “Yes.” But “good tidings we bring” is not just for Christmas but for Christ.

In today’s epistle lesson from 1 Corinthians 1 we hear, starting in verse 10, the reason Paul is writing his letter in the first place. He has heard that there is factionalism in the church. In fact, it borders on, what we would today call a “cult of personality.”

Each church member is aligning themselves with a person—Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or Christ. Paul founded the church, but later sent the apparently eloquent Apollos to follow up. People evidently also knew the Apostle Peter, which is Cephas in Aramaic.

Though Paul sometimes gets a bad rap of being arrogant, here he is saying, “Don’t put me on pedestal. Don’t even begin to compare me or anyone else to Christ.”

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Now to be fair, it is natural for people to become a follower of a teacher.

Certainly, John the Baptist had his disciples as did Greek philosophers, like Plato and Aristotle. But Paul is being quite clear here that there is only one person to follow and that is Jesus Christ.

And not because Jesus was a “better teacher” but because he was the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One of God who died on the cross for us and was raised from dead by God.

Our society today views baptism as more a rite of passage, particularly because it is generally done with infants. In Paul’s day, it was only with adults and who could sincerely confess, “Jesus is Lord.” It was not done casually or without faithful commitment.

But even then, people were starting to brag, “Well, you know *Paul*, the guy Jesus appeared to, baptized me.” Already hierarchies were being created and emphasis being on the baptizer rather than the message.

This is the very reason Jesus didn’t personally baptize but instead oversaw his disciples handling the physical act of baptism. He didn’t want the person get in the way of the message.

As Paul says in verse 17, “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel.” Baptism is merely the start of journey and in fact is more our promise, our pledge to follow Christ rather than a blessing of sanctification.

While we typically translate it as “proclaim the gospel”, in Greek it is the single word, *euaggelizó* [yoo-ang-ghel-ID-zo]. The prefix *eu* [yoo] means “good” or “glad” and the *aggelos* [ang-ghel-os] means “news” or “tidings”.

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So, this verb form means to “announce good news” (which is what “gospel” means) or, as Bible concordances also say, “bring good tidings.”

The literal translation of *euaggelizó* is “evangelize.” But the Greek is never translated that way because the meaning of “evangelize” has evolved more from “bringing good tidings” to “convert to Christianity.” It has gone from a joyful invitation to accept by free choice to being more strident insistence without grace.

The announcement of good tidings is to come from the heart. As the rest of verse 17 says, “and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.” In Paul’s time arguments, even in court, were won by those who spoke most eloquently, not those with best logic and facts. The winners were those who were most persuasive, even if objectively wrong.

We see that today with politicians and, sadly, with churches, particularly, though not exclusively, independent mega-churches where the minister and leaders are accountable to no one, rake in the donations and become millionaires with boats, houses, cars. Even the robber barons of a century ago—Rockefeller, Carnegie, Vanderbilt, and Morgan—set up charitable trusts.

Unlike the church of Corinth, Stone Church continues to strive to “be united in the same mind and the same purpose.” As you read in the annual report and heard from the committee leads our focus and efforts are less on converting people through persuasive arguments than bringing good tidings to people and their kin through our actions.

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We try to be proclaimers of visions of light shining in the darkness, of finding joy even in times of pain and sorrow, of enacting compassion and love in a world in which hatred and distrust seem to reign supreme.

So let us go forth, united in purpose, as ministers of reconciliation who bear the good news of the cross to a world in need of healing and hope. Good tidings we bring to all—who are kin. Good tidings of Christ and a kingdom that's near.

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer.
Amen.