

The Gospel is Good News! In the words of pastor and counsellor Jack Miller, “Cheer up; You’re a worse sinner than you ever dared imagine, and you’re more loved than you ever dared hope.”

In other words, though you will continue to make mistakes and sin, God will prevail in your life through His goodness and grace, if you do not abandon your faith in Him. It’s not about your performance; it’s about your confidence in Jesus’ perfection.

*He paid a debt He did not owe*

*I owed a debt I could not pay*

*I needed Someone to wash my sins away*

*Now I can sing a brand new song, Amazing Grace!*

*Christ Jesus paid the debt that I could never pay.*

(Words by Ellis J. Crum)

We owed a debt we *could not* pay. Jesus paid a debt *He did not owe*. He paid it for you and me. And He paid it *in full*! That should cheer you up this morning!

**Sacred or Secular?**

Too often, however, Christians compartmentalize their lives into the sacred and the secular—church, and the rest of life (especially work)—with the result being that they regularly cast aside their confidence in God during the workweek, looking to their own skills and efforts to get them through and find success, and perhaps take a “spiritual break” over the weekend.

If the Good News they hope to hear on Sunday doesn’t provide practical guidance for application to every area and relationship of life, it’ll likely be left behind come Monday morning.

To make a real difference, the Gospel we read and preach and hear must restore the idea of “vocation” or “calling,” with a fresh return to the notion of work as a contribution to the good of all society, not merely a means of earning money for one’s own advancement—not just a job, but a calling.

Did you know that the word “vocation” comes from the Latin *vocare*—to call? Same root as the words “vocal” and “vocalize.” In its original sense, a job is a vocation only when someone else calls you to it, and you do it for them rather than for yourself.

So, today, our work can be a calling only if it is reframed as a mission of service to someone or something beyond our own interests.

Thinking of work mainly as a means of self-fulfillment or self-aggrandizement slowly crushes a person, and as many others have pointed out, undermines society itself. Gradually, we feel like no more than a cog in wheel—strictly a part, instead of a partner.

The Church of Jesus Christ, on the other hand, calls every member to serve—especially to serve one another in love. All of God’s gifts are given to this end: that we may serve one another and the world around us effectively, through the power of Christ.

Today is Bob and Karen Franck’s last Sunday in San Rafael, after four years of service to our faith community. They are both living examples of believers who have been called by God into service to the church and to the world. They are witnesses for Jesus Christ every day, wherever they find themselves.

They don’t have everything. They don’t know everything. They can’t do everything. But what they have and what they know they give freely, however they can.

I think they have a simple ministry plan:

* Live where they are needed
* Do whatever they can to serve
* Make Jesus known

Now, they are on their way home, to settle down and build themselves a house in Sandpoint, Idaho, and retire from full-time vocational ministry.

But as we who know them are assured, they won’t completely retire, but they’ll be retreaded for the next season of adventure. God willing, we’ll see them again next winter when they can help us make some further improvements to our campus.

In the meantime, so they cannot imagine that we will forget them—in our prayers or in our care—the Church Board has created a new title of fellowship—just for them—in recognition of which, we have created a certificate which we will send along with them. Please offer your congratulations to our first two “Honorary Church Members”! Isn’t this “good news”?!?

The other day, someone said, “We’re not gonna say ‘goodbye…’” as if that signified some finality. Of course, we know that in Christ we’ll see each other again and share eternity together in His presence.

But I like the words “farewell” and “goodbye.”

“Farewell” is a contraction of “fare ye well” or “be well.” Nothing wrong with that sentiment!

And “goodbye” is a contraction of “God be with ye.” I like that prayer, too!

So, Bob and Karen, we say, “Farewell and good bye. We love you! And hope to see you again soon.”

**Good News**

Okay, back to the message…

Do you remember how I began today with Pastor Miller’s encouraging words? “Cheer up; You’re a worse sinner than you ever dared imagine, and you’re more loved than you ever dared hope.”

The Gospel is Good NEWS because the world looks at sin in completely different ways. If it recognizes sin at all, the world tries to deal with sin by endless efforts to hide it, repress it, minimize it, punish it, or simply imagine that it is getting better over time.

And the Gospel is GOOD News, because God’s love for us—demonstrated in the life, death, resurrection, and return of Jesus Christ—is so over-the-top, so never-give-up, so beyond-your-wildest-dreams that it has the power to blow you away again tomorrow, just like it did yesterday!

So for these reasons, Cheer up!

Circumstances can impact any one of us negatively and throw us off balance. But that’s the thing about balance: it requires frequent and continuous adjustments. Balance is never static.

Today, I’m going to share with you eight more reasons to be of good cheer. Here are eight ways in which Jesus Christ brings us courage when life gets us down.

**Eight Reasons to Be of Good Cheer**

***1. Jesus forgives sin***

Matthew 9:1-2

*1 So [Jesus] got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city. 2 Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.”*

The first reason to be of good cheer is that Jesus forgives sin. Having shed His blood in our place, all it takes today is a word from Him, “Your sins are forgiven.” Not, “could be” or “shall be,” but they *are* forgiven. Cheer up!

***2. Jesus calls you to Himself***

Mark 10:46-52

*46 As [Jesus] went out of Jericho with His disciples and a great multitude, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the road begging. 47 And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”*

*48 Then many warned him to be quiet; but he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”*

*49 So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called.*

*Then they called the blind man, saying to him, “Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you.”*

*50 And throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus.*

*51 So Jesus answered and said to him, “What do you want Me to do for you?”*

*The blind man said to Him, “Rabboni, that I may receive my sight.”*

*52 Then Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road.*

The second reason to be of good cheer is that Jesus calls you to Himself. Before He does anything for you, or calls you to do anything for Him, He calls you to come to Him. Come to Jesus today. For in His presence, there is fullness of joy, and fullness of possibilities. Come, and cheer up!

***3. Jesus heals your brokenness***

Luke 8:42-48

*42 But as [Jesus] went, the multitudes thronged Him. 43 Now a woman, having a flow of blood for twelve years, who had spent all her livelihood on physicians and could not be healed by any, 44 came from behind and touched the border of His garment. And immediately her flow of blood stopped.*

*45 And Jesus said, “Who touched Me?”*

*When all denied it, Peter and those with Him said, “Master, the multitudes throng and press You, and You say, ‘Who touched Me?’ ”*

*46 But Jesus said, “Somebody touched Me, for I perceived power going out from Me.” 47 Now when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before Him, she declared to Him in the presence of all the people the reason she had touched Him and how she was healed immediately.*

*48 And He said to her, “Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well. Go in peace.”*

The third reason to be of good cheer is that Jesus heals your brokenness. No matter how long you have been carrying that wound, that disability, that brokenness—Jesus makes you well. You may still be scarred, you may still limp, but you’ll limp as a king, not a pauper.

***4. Christ is with you in the storm***

Mark 6:47-51

*47 Now when evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea; and [Jesus] was alone on the land. 48 Then He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them. Now about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea, and would have passed them by. 49 And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out; 50 for they all saw Him and were troubled. But immediately He talked with them and said to them, “Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.” 51 Then He went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased. And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled.*

The fourth reason to be of good cheer is that Jesus is with you in the midst of the storm. Particularly interesting in this story, is the fact that Jesus saw them straining in the storm, but He did not come to them until the fourth watch of the night (that’s the last watch, between 3:00 and 6:00 AM), just before dawn. I know it troubles us that Jesus sometimes makes us wait for His help, on top of the trouble for which we need His help. But His timing is perfect and purposeful. And He is faithful to come. Don’t be afraid; cheer up!

***5. Jesus has overcome what troubles you***

John 16:31-33

*31 Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? 32 Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. 33 These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”*

A fifth reason to be of good cheer is that Jesus has overcome whatever troubles you. This passage seems especially apropos to our present circumstance: scattered, each on his own. Yet we are not alone, for the Spirit of Christ is with us. And the things that trouble us are the things of this world, and Jesus has truly overcome this world and its troubles. He has gone to prepare a place for us, in a world without troubles—a world of only opportunities. And, although, this present world is full of troubles—because of Jesus—it is also full of opportunities now. So, cheer up!

***6. God has further plans for you***

Acts 23:10-11

*10 Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks.*

*11 But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.”*

A sixth reason to be of good cheer is that Jesus has further plans for you. No matter what you may be facing today—whether hardship or success—God has something more for you to do. If you will listen for His voice, He will share with you things that are to come, and how you are to respond. You are a vital partner in His plan to bring others to know Him, just as you do. Perhaps you will plow, perhaps you will sow, perhaps you will tend, perhaps you will harvest—the assignment is in His hand. Just know that it is coming, and cheer up!

***7. The Lord is your strength***

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

*7–10 (Paul said,) Because of the extravagance of those revelations, and so I wouldn’t get a big head, I was given the gift of a handicap to keep me in constant touch with my limitations. Satan’s angel did his best to get me down; what he in fact did was push me to my knees. No danger then of walking around high and mighty! At first I didn’t think of it as a gift, and begged God to remove it. Three times I did that, and then He told me,*

*My grace is enough; it’s all you need.*

*My strength comes into its own in your weakness.*

*Once I heard that, I was glad to let it happen. I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ’s strength moving in on my weakness. Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size—abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become.*

The seventh reason to be of good cheer is that Jesus is your strength when you haven’t enough of your own. Do you recognize your handicaps as gifts from God? Or do you complain of them as assaults from the devil? Praying for their removal is fine. But if they don’t budge, perhaps it’s time to take a different approach. Instead, in your weakness, recognize Christ as your strength. Lean on Him, and move forward in faith. Cheer up!

***8. Jesus is coming back for you***

2 Corinthians 5:2-8

*2-5 Compared to what’s coming, living conditions around here seem like a stopover in an unfurnished shack, and we’re tired of it! We’ve been given a glimpse of the real thing, our true home, our resurrection bodies! The Spirit of God whets our appetite by giving us a taste of what’s ahead. He puts a little of heaven in our hearts so that we’ll never settle for less.*

*6–8 That’s why we live with such good cheer. You won’t see us drooping our heads or dragging our feet! Cramped conditions here don’t get us down. They only remind us of the spacious living conditions ahead. It’s what we trust in, but don’t yet see, that keeps us going. Do you suppose a few ruts in the road or rocks in the path are going to stop us? When the time comes, we’ll be plenty ready to exchange exile for homecoming.*

The eighth reason to be of good cheer is that Jesus is coming back for you. This world is not our home. We have been born again for better things! Jesus has gone ahead to prepare a place for us, and He will return to gather us home. Quit trying to makeover this world into heaven-on-earth, and start living in this world as one who belongs to the next. Bring the aroma of heaven into your relationships by living as Jesus would. Show people that your true citizenship is in heaven, not on earth. Cheer up!

**Our Hour**

We are walking through uncharted territories these days. We are surrounded by frustration, fear, and suspicion. Plans and routines have been disrupted. Many people have lost their livelihood.

The American god of science cannot deliver us. While its priests collect data and study statistical charts, and cast lots for our future, notable politicians emote arguments that confuse, instead of clarify. Everyone seems to have something to offer, yet no one can give a clear answer.

Many seem incapable of learning the lessons of 100 years ago (when the Spanish Flu raged against us), preferring instead, to recall the virus-free comforts of one year ago, and protest the process of flattening the curve and keeping the most people safe.

As days turn into weeks, and weeks into months, patience wears thin. And sometimes, love grows cold.

And as long as we are looking behind us to wish for what we had, we will miss the opportunities before us. God has not been caught off guard, and He will not be mocked by our petulant complaints. It is up to us—you and me—to be still enough to know He is God in the midst of this storm, and hear what His Spirit has to say to the churches.

This is our hour to shine!

Don’t trade self-restraint for self-indulgence. Pursue love, not license.

Don’t swap grace for grumbling, or prayer for pointing fingers.

Let’s be the light that shines the way for others. Cheer up, my friends!

Perhaps you didn’t realize that Jesus offered so much in return for simply trusting Him. He is the God who saves—with life, with love, with hope, and peace. Come to Him today. Humble yourself at His feet and pledge your allegiance to Him (not to a philosophy, not to a particular church)—to the Creator who is our Savior, who loved us and gave Himself for us, who is with us in spirit and will come again for us in person.

He paid a debt He did not owe, so you could live a life you don’t deserve.

Put your trust in Jesus Christ today and pray this prayer with me:

*Lord Jesus, please forgive my selfishness and my sins.*

*Fill me with your Spirit and your grace.*

*Make today the first day of my new life with You.*

*Lead me in every circumstance and relationship, to honor You and express my faith.*

*Thank You for Your unstoppable love.*

*Fill me with unstoppable courage and cheer, because I belong to You.*

*Amen.*