

The Content Of The Kerygma - Good News For The World!

Kerygma. Gospel. Good News.

If you want to talk about Churchy language, then the word, “kerygma” is at the top of the list. In modern times it is only used in Christian circles and even then, not widely. This is unfortunate, because a lot of the answers to our problems lie in a deeper understanding what the kerygma is and how we ought to be using it.

Kerygma is a Greek word which means “*proclamation*”. In the Christian context, it zeroes in more precisely on the proclamation of the Good News (or “Gospel”) of Jesus life, death, and resurrection. In other words, Jesus came to save us and the message we proclaim is about him. It need not be complex or too long. In fact, we ought to be able to tell the saving story of Jesus’ life in a simple manner that can be understood by all. That is what this post is for - to go through the basic content of the kerygma.

The goal of any proclamation of the kerygma is conversion. We want to be instruments of God, so others might have an encounter and response to his grace and mercy, and so become disciples of Jesus. This is the point. We proclaim Jesus to make disciples of Jesus. After conversion, we aim at other things (e.g., catechesis). As the *General Directory of Catechesis* states, in paragraph 61:

“Primary proclamation is addressed to non-believers and those living in religious indifference. Its functions are to proclaim the Gospel and to call to conversion. Catechesis, “distinct from the primary proclamation of the Gospel”, promotes and matures initial conversion, educates the convert in the faith and incorporates him into the Christian community. The relationship between these two forms of the ministry of the word is, therefore, a relationship of complementary distinction. Primary proclamation, which every Christian is called to perform, is part of that “Go” which Jesus imposes on his disciples: it implies, therefore, a going-out, a haste, a message. Catechesis, however, starts with the condition indicated by Jesus himself: “whosoever believes”, whosoever converts, whosoever decides.”

We have to remember that our journey is going to be full of moments. We have talked about these moments in other posts, but a quick reminder of them:

1 - Pre-evangelization = relationship building where we earn the right to proclaim the kerygma.

2 - Evangelization = the explicit proclamation of the kerygma, and invitation to respond,

and the initial conversion of the one who is the subject of our evangelization.

3 - Discipleship = post-conversion following of Jesus. This includes catechesis, growth in prayer, maturity in virtue, and mission/service to others.

So, what is the content of the kerygma? First of all, I will present several different ways of presenting this Good News of Jesus. None of them are complete and yet all of them are good ways of presenting the kerygma. Again, we want to keep the message simple. I will divide by the number of elements each has or the theme that surrounds the story.

Four Elements - A:

1. the loving plan of God for humanity
2. sin and its consequences, especially separation from God;
3. God's answer to our problem - in the sending of his Son for our salvation
4. The response this grace calls forth from every person: to repent, believe in Jesus, & be baptized

Four Elements - B:

5. God made us for relationship with Him.
6. We sinned and then broke the relationship we were intended to have.
7. Jesus (who is God and man) came to heal that relationship, through sacrificing his life, rising again, and giving us the Church.
8. We have the opportunity to respond, by choosing to have Jesus be our Lord and Savior.

Seven Elements of the Kerygma:

9. God loves you and has a plan for your life. Sin will destroy you.
10. Christ Jesus died to save you.
11. Repent and believe the Gospel.
12. Be Baptized and receive the Holy Spirit.
13. Abide in Christ and his body the Church.
14. Go make disciples.

'Great Story' of Jesus in 9 'acts' (Sherry Weddell):

15. The Kingdom - God is love. We are created to be with Him.
16. Jesus, Face of the Kingdom - Jesus is the way in which we participate in God's Kingdom.

17. Jesus, the Kingdom in Word and Deed. Jesus does the works of the Kingdom; especially in healing & forgiving
18. Jesus embraces the cross - Jesus' ministry results in the embrace of the cross for us, not in success as the world would understand it.
19. Resurrection, Ascension, New Life, Adoption and the Kingdom - Through his death and resurrection Jesus opens the way to new life for all.
20. Jesus Asks me to follow him - Discipleship as an intentional decision - the price of following Jesus
21. Personal Sin and Forgiveness - The forgiveness of sin, and therefore, our need to acknowledge our sin, is at the heart of the Gospel.
22. Dropping the Net - "Discipleship is expressed by repentance of personal sin and baptism into Jesus' life, death, resurrection and body on earth - the Church - or by the renewal of baptismal grace through confession and return to the regular practice of the faith."
23. The Life of Discipleship - ready to begin a lifetime of following Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Kingdom of Jesus:

24. Jesus reveals the Kingdom - He proclaimed the Kingdom of God was present
25. Jesus is the King - Jesus is revealed as the King of all
26. The Clash of 2 Very Different Kingdoms - Jesus will eventually defeat even sin and death
27. The Church is the Seed of the Kingdom - We are part of it, but are called to more

In a narrative form, it can look many different ways. Here is one:

God's plan for humanity is that we would always be in relationship with him. In fact, we are made to be with God forever, because he made us in his "image and likeness". But, humans have sinned and this sin has caused a break in our relationship with God. Still, God had a plan to save us. He sent his Son, Jesus, to come and win us back to God. He lived, died, and rose from the dead in order to gain power over our sin and death. He laid down his own life, so that we can have eternal life. Now that we have this opportunity, it is up to us to respond to his gift of grace and mercy. Jesus waits for each of us to say "yes" to repenting of our sins, believing in him, being baptized, and living a life that glorifies God, so we can live forever in Heaven with him and as many others as possible. The choice is your own. Would you like to choose this grace today?

Some tips when proclaiming the kerygma:

- *Avoid Churchy or “insider” language.* You need not talk about any deep theology when you are presenting the basic kerygma. That should follow a conversion.
- *Pray before you start.* If we want to be vessels of grace for others, we need to make sure we are examining our motives and being faithful and humble.
- *Don’t stop before inviting a response.* Too often many Catholics think it is too “Protestant” a thing to do. Read the book of Acts and see how many times the Apostles invited a response. Hint - every time they preached!
- *Be ok with the awkwardness of the moment* (especially the first few times). This isn’t supposed to be easy because it could end up being the most important event in another person’s life!

An example of preaching the Kerygma and inviting a response, from St. Peter, in Acts 2:

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him,

*‘I saw the Lord always before me,
for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;
therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;
moreover my flesh will dwell in hope.*

For thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor let thy Holy One see corruption.

*Thou hast made known to me the ways of life;
thou wilt make me full of gladness with thy presence.’*

“Brethren, I may say to you confidently of the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens; but he himself says,

‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand,

till I make thy enemies a stool for thy feet.'

Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." And he testified with many other words and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Finally, here are some quotes about the Kerygma, from Church documents:

- "The initial, ardent proclamation, by which a person is one day overwhelmed and brought to the decision to entrust himself to Jesus Christ by faith." JP II, *Catechesi Tradendae* 25
- "In the complex reality of mission, initial proclamation has a central and irreplaceable role, since it introduces man "into the mystery of the love of God, who invites him to enter into a personal relationship with himself in Christ" and opens the way to conversion." -JP II, *Redemptoris Missio* 44
- "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" -1 Cor. 9:16
- "For we do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord" - 2 Cor 4:5
- "I am eager to preach the gospel also to you in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." -Rom 1:15-16
- "even the finest witness will prove ineffective in the long run if it is not explained, justified - what Peter called always having "your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have" - and made explicit by a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus. The Good News proclaimed by the witness of life sooner or later has to be proclaimed by the word of life. There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed." -Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*
- "an apostolate of this kind does not consist only in the witness of one's way of life; a true apostle looks for opportunities to announce Christ by words addressed either to non-believers with a view to leading them to faith, or to the faithful with a view to instructing, strengthening, and encouraging them to a more fervent life. "For the charity of Christ impels us" (2 Cor. 5:14)." -Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 6
- "The preaching of the early Church was centered on the proclamation of Jesus Christ, with whom the kingdom was identified. Now, as then, there is a need to unite the proclamation of the kingdom of God (the content of Jesus'; own "kerygma"); and the proclamation of the

Christ-event (the “kerygma” of the apostles). The two proclamations are complementary; each throws light on the other.” -JPII, *Redemptoris Missio*

- “In catechesis too, we have rediscovered the fundamental role of the first announcement or kerygma, which needs to be the center of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal . . . it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level and moment.” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 164)
- “We must not think that in catechesis the kerygma gives way to a supposedly more ‘solid’ formation. Nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful, and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation. All Christian formation consists of entering more deeply into the kerygma.” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 165)

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