



Good News

Maggie Schlageter

Jesus said, I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent. (Luke 4:43)

My dad likes to start most days with the NY Times, a cup of coffee, and toast. It's his morning ritual. As I've grown, this ritual has looked more and more appealing to me; taking a mindful moment to pause and connect with reality and my day in an intentional way. I started getting the morning paper delivered a few years ago and have worked it into my weekend routine.

When I started getting the paper, at first glance, the headlines generally seemed bleak. I was wondering how I would be able to enjoy my weekends after starting them with the heaviness of the news of our world. Between the Saturday and Sunday papers there are about a dozen different sections. The front pages tend to focus on war and injustice; concerns about the economy and our warming planet; and politics and the tensions around upcoming elections or problematic personalities in candidates.

However, when reading some of the finer print, I soon realized the news is actually full of hope. There are stories about lifetime accomplishments of service and of love; articles focusing on advancements in medicine, education, and technology; and whole sections devoted to beauty in art, music, and creation. The news is full of hope in a better future.

There is good news to be read and to be inspired by.

But that's not what we commonly hear in Sunday morning exhortations. I have heard far too many messages about how bad the world we live in is. These messages typically come as sweeping statements, lacking in hard data. And I have found them hard to swallow.

In some ways, the one-sided picture painted by these exhortations doesn't align with what I've observed: in the world around me, in my faith community, and in my own life. I want to give the other side of the story. So, if you are hoping to find statistics on ways our world is declining, you will not be finding that data here. There are already enough people talking about how bad

the world is so I am not going to be presenting that side. There are enough news sources focusing on the negative, and it is far too easy to bring suffering to mind. It is much more challenging to look for good news. And that is the challenge I am happy to undertake.

An Improving World

The world has gotten better in a lot of ways. Even before looking at specific data and figures, there are obvious indications of this: life expectancy is longer; more people are educated and have access to information than ever before; there are cures for health ailments that used to be a death sentence; less people live in food insecurity; and there are formal systems to prevent discrimination and social injustices.

When I started doing hard research on how the world we live in is improving, it became clear that it wasn't just my impression. If you look at the data, we all – globally – are doing better. It's not just optimism or positive framing. And the figures demonstrate that improvements are worldwide, not just in North America or other parts of the west.

The book *Factfulness* written by Hans Rosling, along with his son Ola Rosling, and daughter-in-law Anna Rosling Ronnlund, was written in 2018, and emphasizes this point. The complete title being *Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World and Why Things are Better Than You Think*. Hans Rosling was a Swedish physician, professor and statistician. He began his work to show that the vast majority of people are wrong about their negative impressions of the state of the world. He died from pancreatic cancer about a year before *Factfulness* was published.

While people generally believe the world is poorer, less healthy, and more dangerous than it actually is, Rosling demonstrates that this is a false impression, arising partly as a result of misinformation, and partly from natural instincts that keep us from seeing the world “factfully”. These instincts range from the *fear instinct*, that we pay more attention to scary things, to the *size instinct*, that standalone numbers often look more impressive than they really are, to the *gap instinct*, that most people fall between two extremes. Rosling argues that these instincts make it difficult for people to put events in perspective. And it's why many of us believe things are worse than they are.

So let's try to turn that around. Here are some facts of global good news that I've collected. Most of my sources, which includes *Factfulness* and a handful of other books and articles, cite their data to be current to years between 2019 and 2023.

Life Expectancy

In 1800, among all babies who were ever born, roughly half died during their childhood! Just think about that for a moment, and apply it to your own family.

Global life expectancy was just 30 years, and no country had a life expectancy above 40. In 1870, life expectancy at birth was still only 45 years. But in 2022, life expectancy in the *poorest* country in the world was 54! And the average life expectancy around the world? 72 years. Today, *every single country in the world* has a lower infant or child mortality rate than it had 50 years ago.

Crime

In the US, the violent crime rate has been on a downward trend since 1990. In 1990, around 14.5 million crimes were reported. By 2016 that figure was well under 9.5 million.

On the global scale a similar picture emerges. There are 180,000 people walking around today who would have been murdered in 2023 if the global homicide rate had remained at the same level from just a dozen years ago.

Diseases

In 1900, more than 37% of deaths worldwide were caused by infectious diseases. By 1955, that number dropped to less than 5% and by 2009 just 2% of deaths were caused by infectious diseases. Since 1990, the control of infectious disease has saved the lives of more than a 100 million children worldwide.

Before 1996, AIDS patients were given 18 months to live post-diagnosis. Today, with advancements in medical technologies and treatments, a person living with AIDS has a similar life expectancy to an AIDS-negative person, providing they are diagnosed in good time and adhere to their treatments.

In 2022, a new malaria vaccine was invented and distributed. The World Health Organization estimates that roughly 40,000 to 80,000 children annually will be saved as a result.

Environment

Wild mammal populations are growing. Over the last 50 years, many species have made an incredible comeback, with stable and self-perpetuating populations of large animals, from whales to bison, rebounding from shrinking numbers.

Between 1961 and 2009 the amount of land used to grow food increased by 12%, but the amount of food that was grown increased by 300%. Producing more food used to require proportionately more land, but with modern agricultural practices we are able to produce more food from less land, which means less impact on wildlife habitats.

Education

The literacy rate from the 17th to 19th century was just one-eighth of the global population. Early in the 19th century, 12% of the world could read and write. In 2022, it was reported that 87% of the world is literate.

Quality of Life

In 1870, the share of homes that had electricity was exactly zero. As of 2021, the global electricity access rate was 91%. In 1929 Americans spent more than 60% of their disposable income on necessities; by 2016 that had fallen to 33%. The average American now retires at age 63, whereas one hundred years ago, the average American was dead by the age 51. In 1920, time spent on laundry was on average 11.5 hours a week compared to the average of 1.5 hours now.

Thinking about Positive Change

This was a flavor of many threads of irrefutable good news about the state of our world. Even in the face of wars and genocide and violence and mental health crises and heart breaking losses, there are major tangible trends of positive change. The world can be bad and also getting better at the same time.

Within our community, these trends of positive change are also present. A recent article called *Let's Talk About Change* by Carmel Page¹ contains data on ways the Christadelphian community has changed in the last several years, with a focus on ecclesias in the UK. In her

¹ Carmel Page, *Let's Talk About Change*, Press On Journal, Issue 18

article, she shares that there are currently 20 meetings in the UK where women and men are permitted to serve equally in their ecclesias. I can't help but feel encouraged by this news. Personally, over the last few years I have had the opportunity to share my spiritual thoughts in articles and invited to give exhortations and share sweet fellowship with my dear spiritual community around the globe, which has been extremely beneficial to me and something that certainly wasn't happening just a few years ago.

There is good news to be witnessed globally and personally and in our faith community in spite of the real tragedies that we witness. Yes, there are problems in our faith community. I have felt the sting of dear brothers and sisters leaving. Things can be bad and getting better at the same time. And it's so important to see both sides.

The Gospel

What does all of this good news have to do with the “Good News” that we read about in the Gospel? The Good News that Jesus shares with his followers – the message of the Gospel as I read and understand it – is that God has a plan to fill the whole world with his glory, and that we are part of the plan. God is working his plan for positive changes for the world through Jesus and is interested in partnering with us.

In Luke 4, Jesus reads from Isaiah, declares his mission statement, and then he *does it!*

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me

to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives

and recovering of sight to the blind,

to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

(Luke 4:18)

Jesus travels to Capernaum where he heals a man with a mental health disorder. He rids Simon's mother-in-law of her fever, which was a much more complicated ailment before the modern medicines we have readily available to us. Then he goes on to heal all of the sick who came to him. And he continued to preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God in other towns as well, bettering the lives of those around him.

As a community, we tend to focus on just the future fulfillment of the Kingdom of God to the exclusion of a present sense also. But considering the data we've examined and the language that Jesus uses to talk about the Kingdom in the Gospel, it is intriguing to see elements of the Kingdom of God coming into being right now.

In Mark 4, Jesus speaks in parables about the Kingdom of God and in two examples he compares it to a seed. First, the parable of the Seed Growing:

The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come. (Mark 4:26-29)

Then the parable of the Mustard Seed:

With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade. (Mark 4:30-32)

The Kingdom of God is like the smallest of seeds. It has been sown. And now it is growing and gradually becoming larger. This seed is growing right now. We are sleeping and rising night and day, and God is giving the increase.

There are many passages in which Jesus is teaching a present aspect to the kingdom of God, not only a future kingdom.²

Whatever city you enter and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you, and heal the sick who are there, and say to them, the kingdom of God has come near to you. But whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, the very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near to you. (Luke 10:8-11)

As the disciples were traveling from city to city, they were participating in the Kingdom of God.

² This isn't a new topic and I'm just skimming the surface. I recommend Anthony Green's article *God's Kingdom Within Reach* in Press On Journal for additional details

Now when he was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus answered them and said, “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say ‘see here’, or ‘see there’, for behold the kingdom of God is in the midst of you. (Luke 17:20-21)

Jesus spoke of a kingdom that they couldn't see coming, because it was already present in their midst!

The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached and everyone is pressing into it. (Luke 16:16)

The terms that Jesus uses to teach about the Kingdom of God are active and present tense!

In the passages we've reviewed, Jesus talks about the kingdom as a seed that is growing into fullness, a Kingdom that is close in proximity now, a Kingdom that is located in the now, and a Kingdom that is in our very midst.

It is God's will that the whole earth be filled with his glory. (Num 14:21)

The Kingdom is at Hand

The kingdom is at hand, it is near, it is among us. Perhaps we just need to adjust our perspective to see it a bit more clearly. Perhaps even to a perspective that sees that the world is getting better with tangible trends of positive change *because Jesus is working the glory of the Kingdom into being today*. We read earlier in the book of Luke of when Jesus healed the sick in Capernaum, just as he is healing sick today, perhaps through miracles, or the hands of doctors, or through medical discoveries and advancements. Of course, there are many limitations, many failures, not every sick person finds healing in this life. We experience these tragedies. Mental health and spiritual lack are ever present around us. And many of these dimensions of pain and suffering may never be solved until Jesus returns. But that doesn't mean we cannot witness and celebrate the positive changes that have been accomplished.

Witnessing the good news and the capital G “Good News” in our day to day provides us all with an opportunity. Just as the Disciples who walked with Jesus in the Gospel accounts took on his mission and followed him, we have the same opportunity. How can you participate in the Good News of the Kingdom of God, today? Jesus said,

I must proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent. (Luke 4:43)

What does it look like to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God with your life?
Because that is why we have been sent.

Further reading

Hans Rosling, Ola Rosling, and Anna Rosling Ronnlund, *Factfulness*

awealthofcommonsense.com/2023/04/50-ways-the-world-is-getting-better-2/

time.com/6243557/positive-stories-2022/

www.npr.org/2009/11/10/120249388/aids-patients-now-living-longer-but-aging-faster

gapminder.org

unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/

www.statista.com/statistics/997360/global-adult-and-youth-literacy/

www.forbes.com/advisor/retirement/average-retirement-age/