We wait for all people to know the good news is for all people.

In the opening song of the popular musical “Wicked,” the very first line heard is literally GOOD NEWS.

GOOD NEWS!!! (She’s dead, the witch of the west is dead, the wickedest witch there ever was, the enemy of all of us here in Oz, is dead!) Good news!

And while this particular song is about a person dying and not particularly about the Gospel good news, Wicked stands in parallel to the story of the shepherds in our text today.

While watching Wicked, we are onlookers of the story of Glinda and Elphaba, who are seemingly complete opposites in this coming-of-age film.

The film wrestles with the stereotypes and labels we all create for each person we meet. Elphaba is green, an outcast, has special powers, and is trying to find her way in life. Glinda, bright-eyed and blonde-haired, the quintessential “popular girl” everyone wants to be or be friends with, was struggling to find her way in a world she had previously thought was all hers to reign over.

As the story progresses, we come to find out there’s more to the story than a wicked witch vs a good witch.

Good news, beloveds, like dear Glinda and Elphaba, there’s more to today’s story than meets the eye.

The shepherds tending their flocks in the middle of the night seem like unlikely stewards of this good news, and yet, angels appear to them, telling them to “go! See that the good news is for you too.”

Gale Yee reminds us, “Shepherds measure low culturally and are unanticipated recipients of the message that a Messiah is born to them. The inauspicious becomes auspicious, and out of character for their marginal status, shepherds become witnesses to others. (Gale A. Yee. Fortress Commentary on the Bible: Two Volume Set (Function). Kindle Edition.)”

God starts where God starts with the shepherds because they will know.

The good news always begins in the margins, where most people least expect.

And that is where justice ministries like the Nebraska Synod’s Queerly Beloved team do their work, on behalf of the whole synod. We work to make the good news known that God’s love is truly for all people, without condition or exception.

Jesus himself knew what it was like to be rejected, and our particular ministry is centered on folks who have often been rejected by the church: the LGBTQIA+ community. We affirm who

people are – and whom they love – celebrating the diverse and beautiful tapestry of humanity God has made.

Through things like resource-sharing, education, advocacy, and events, we stand in solidarity with our LGBTQIA+ siblings. And we recognize that queer people aren't just a "them" out there somewhere for the church to embrace; queer people are part of our church communities – part of the body of Christ – and always have been.

And the transformational power of community – of relationships – is what enables this ministry to happen. It's God's love acting in us and through us that has the power to transform the world.

Justice ministry is about the margins, where the good news begins. It's about joining in God's work where it begins – the work of welcoming all people into the kingdom.

This story of the shepherds and the angels shows us, right from the very beginning of the life of Jesus, that this ministry matters – justice ministry matters. It isn't something marginal to the life of faith, something optional. It is central to who we are called to be as followers of Christ.

Advent is a season of waiting: waiting for the coming of the kingdom, waiting for the good news to be known by all people. But this waiting is not a passive thing. Many of the stories we read around this time of year focus on being watchful and ready and active. We don't just idly wait for the good news to be known – we work to make it so. We don't just wait for the kingdom to come – we actively partner with God to work for justice and peace in the world here and now.

When we engage in justice work, we do more than just preach the good news to our neighbors. We live it out. We make it so.

That good news starts in the margins with the shepherds, with the queerly beloveds, with the Elphabas of the world.

But it doesn't stop there. The good news is truly for all people – and all truly means all: shepherds and Pharisees, queer and straight, Elphaba and Glinda, us and you.

And that is truly the good news!