

## **Searched by the Psalms**

### **A Prayer for Restoration**

**Psalm 80:1-2 & 8-19 & Luke 12:49-56  
(Hymns – 477, 377, 389, 472)**

This morning I want to talk frankly  
about the future of this congregation.  
That desire was sparked by studying Psalm 80.  
It is a prayer for the restoration of the community,  
a corporate prayer for help.  
There are a few other such prayers in the Psalter –  
Psalms 44, 74, 79, and 83.  
These Psalms all express the voice of the community  
and feature recollections of God's ways and work in the past.  
They all ask for the restoration of God's grace and favour.

There are some common features in these Psalms worth noting:

- They are petitions to hear and help
- In their descriptions of troubles, they speak of God's absence or wrath, the community's humiliation and suffering, and the power and arrogance of enemies
- Their requests are linked to their loyalty to God, to God's honour and glory
- They assert an ongoing trust in God on the part of the community
- They review what God has done in the past for the community and recall God's sovereignty in the world
- Grateful praise is promised for the sought help

In Psalm 80, the image of the grapevine is prominent.  
Israel is likened to a grapevine,  
planted in its own land  
after having been brought with loving hands out of Egypt,  
recalling for God and the whole community  
the history of the liberation of the people of Israel  
from its bondage in Egypt.  
The growth of the vine under the care of God  
is summarized.  
Then the protection disappears  
And enemies seem to have clear and unfettered access  
to trample down the vines and feed on the grapes.  
Further, they have set it on fire and cut it down.  
The vine faces utter destruction.

The prayer, in face of these circumstances, is one for preservation and protection of God's chosen people, the community that was once strong in the Lord's grace and favour.

The promise of the people  
Is to never turn away from God  
in their praise, their witness, and their service to God.  
That is their salvation –  
delighting together in individual and collective living  
that is faithful and loyal to the God  
who has been steadfastly faithful to his part of the covenant.  
God will be our God, and we will be God's people.

In the New Testament's witness to Jesus Christ as this God with us,  
the image of the vine is taken up afresh.  
Jesus Christ is the vine and we are the branches.  
Every effort is made to destroy the vine,  
but it thrives and flourishes by God's grace.  
In the end, it overcomes death itself  
and brings everlasting life  
for all who are grafted into its source of abundant life.  
We are encouraged and equipped,  
through the work of the Holy Spirit,  
to be fruitful branches of this divine vine.  
That, and only that, will restore the health and flourishing of the vine.

In John's Gospel, Jesus makes this clear:

*I am the real vine, and my Father is the gardener.  
He breaks off every branch in me that does not bear fruit,  
and he prunes every branch that does bear fruit,  
so that it will be clean and bear more fruit.  
You have been made clean already  
By the teaching I have given you.  
Remain united to me, and I will remain united to you.  
A branch cannot bear fruit by itself;  
It can do so only if it remains in the vine.  
In the same way you cannot bear fruit  
unless you remain in me.*  
(John 15:1-4 GNB)

We are pruned by taking seriously the teachings of Jesus Christ and bear fruit by being strongly grafted into him as our source of flourishing.

That is what will restore the flourishing of this congregation,  
even more than we are currently flourishing –  
remaining strongly connected to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord  
and taking his teachings seriously  
in our individual and communal lives.

For the foreseeable future, this congregation  
will grow strong by continuing to do what it is currently doing.

We are warmly inviting people  
to get centred in Jesus Christ in worship and learning,  
to enjoy community with Jesus Christ in fellowship,  
and to experience the compassion of Jesus Christ in service.

We are giving generously so that this happen week after week.

We are building a partnership in mission and ministry  
with Burnaby Taiwanese Presbyterian Church  
so that the facilities can be used more fully  
for the glory of God.

We are providing a home for the education of our community's youth  
through the work of the Vision Montessori School.

We are providing learning opportunities for our children and each other  
in our Friday evening Bible studies and children's events.

We are planning programs,  
especially build around the musical interests and talents in the congregation,  
that will serve and introduce us to our neighbours in this community.

And, most consistently and most important,  
we are providing thoughtful and moving worship  
week after week

that nourishes souls to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ.

What we value most about Brentwood Presbyterian Church –  
worship, learning, fellowship, and service –  
through God's grace and your wisdom and generosity  
is happening well.

But there is one thing that we need to do better.

In the secular world, they call it marketing.

In the real work, we call it witnessing.

We need to get better at letting people know  
how they can enjoy the benefits we are enjoying  
through our relationship with Jesus Christ.

We need to spend some time praying and thinking together  
about various ways of spreading the word  
about what is happening here at Brentwood  
in the name of and for the sake of Jesus Christ.

We are located, again by God's grace,  
in the heart of one of the most rapidly growing communities in Burnaby.  
New people move into our neighbourhood,  
especially into the apartments buildings and townhouses just south of us,  
every day of every week of the year.  
But how do we get our invitation to them?  
That's the challenge.

I don't have any clear answers yet.  
But I do have the ability and will to begin to convene some serious conversations  
within this congregation,  
with our brothers and sisters in the Taiwanese congregation,  
and with other congregations facing the same opportunities in the presbytery,  
to generate possibilities for consideration and implementation.

So, put your praying and thinking caps on.  
Throughout the early part of this fall,  
we will be seeking further guidance from Jesus Christ  
on how we can make the work and witness of this congregation  
better known in this community.

And here's one thing that we can all do right now.  
We can extend the invitation to come and see  
to our friends and neighbours and families.  
Don't worry about the response.  
That's the Holy Spirit's work.  
Our work is to simply invite people to join us  
in enjoying what God offers in Jesus Christ here at Brentwood.  
Inviting people to come with you to church  
is still the #1 way churches grow.  
It's the primary way we will help God restore even more  
the fortunes of Brentwood as we flourish in our service to Jesus Christ.

Now, let us go and make it so.

Written and preached by the Rev. Dr. Brian Fraser  
Minister with Brentwood Presbyterian Church  
Burnaby, BC  
[www.brentwoodpc.ca](http://www.brentwoodpc.ca)

August 15, 2010