

Anticipating the Reign of Christ – Advent 2010

All the World – Really!

December 5, 2010

Isaiah 11:1-10 & Psalm 100
(Hymns – 784, 612, 529, 563)

I still find the vision in Psalm 100,
of “all the world”
coming together to worship Jesus Christ
and going out to serve in Jesus Christ
difficult to grasp.

In the Hebrew original of this Psalm,
the word translated “worship” also means “service.”
So, both our coming together in joyful praise
to remember and learn more of God’s grace
and our going out into the world to live in its strength
are included in the meaning of this word.
God’s people, called to be a blessing to all the world,
take great joy in walking in God’s ways, loving him in Jesus Christ,
and living out the gifts of the Spirit as a witness in all the world.

But somehow, this vision of all the world living out God’s calling
doesn’t seem very real in our neighbourhoods these days.

Small groups of faithful Christians scattered around the world,
gathering in public or in secret,
being strengthened and instructed to endure in their faith
seems to be a more accurate description of the current reality.

The rest of the world
is either hostile or indifferent.

Indifference is certainly the dominant response to Christianity
here on the West Coast in Canada.

There was an interesting – if somewhat disturbing – article
in the *Vancouver Sun* on Friday this week
reporting on statistics of religious affiliation and practices.

The study was done at the University of Michigan
and reviewed data collected in more than 400 surveys
done over 30 years involving 750,000 people in 14 different countries.

It found that 24.6% of Canadians say they go to church regularly,
but only 10.2% actually do.

And those numbers are averaged across Canada.

But we know that the west coast is the most secularized or non-religious
region in the country, so Vancouver's numbers in regular church attendance
are probably down in the 5-8% range.

There has been a dramatic shift in those numbers over the past 35 years.
In 1974, 41% of those surveyed said they went to church regularly in Canada,
while 22% actually did.

Those are still low numbers,
indicating that, while indifference is growing, it is not new.
"All the world" shows a disturbing indifference
to what we Christians hold most dear –
God's eternal goodness, love, and faithfulness
to the flourishing of the world
that he created and is creating with ongoing care and compassion.

We see the world in a particular and increasingly peculiar way.
We see it through the eyes of Jesus Christ,
made possible by the inner workings of the Holy Spirit.
We believe that God acted for the redemption of the whole world,
reconciling and restoring his original intention for creation,
in the person of Jesus Christ.
To come to worship and go to serve
the Father, made known in the Son, and present in power in the Spirit,
is the rhythm of the missional life
God calls those who acknowledge him to live as a public witness.

The purpose of that life of worship and service
is to bless all the world.
The signs of God's blessing, if we are to believe the prophecies of Isaiah,
are wisdom. Knowledge, skill, reverence, fairness, justice, and integrity,
all contributing to a world living together in peace.

That is the grand vision for all the world.
That is the way of life we are committed to as Christians.
That is the life of gratitude appropriate to the gift
of the grace of Jesus Christ.
When we promise here at Brentwood
to nourish people to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ,
that is the vision that inspires and sustains us.

In the peculiarity of this view of life lies its power to transform all the world.

But what can we do,
living and witnessing as we do in the midst of such massive indifference?

I fervently believe we can do a lot and that we are already doing it.
We can do it better, but the basics are already there.

The steps are small and simple.
We've talked about them before,
and will again.

They are modeling, inviting, and learning.

We model for others lives that are nourished
by the gifts of the Spirit – love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, humility, and self-control.
These are the qualities that bless all the world.
They are the qualities of being together
that make the Reign of Christ real
in all the world.

We invite people to join us in worshiping and serving
in the community of the Holy Trinity
in which these qualities of living together
are practiced and nurtured.

And we continue to learn together more and more
about the grandeur of God's vision
and the riches of God's grace.

We are teachable friends of God in Jesus Christ,
open to the inspiration and instruction of the Holy Spirit.

Model the way, invite people to enjoy God's grace, and keep learning –
these are the best ways to serve God's desire
to attract all the world into his reign of peace and well-being.

Written and preached by the Rev. Dr. Brian Fraser
Minister with Brentwood Presbyterian Church
Burnaby, BC
www.brentwoodpc.ca