

Being the Church at Brentwood

Belong, Believe, and Become

**Psalm 62 & Mark 1:14-20
(Hymns – 480, 373, 368, 671)**

January 22, 2012

There are times when something deeper
than the story on the surface
strikes me while encountering the Spirit of the Living Word
in the words of the text.

That's what happened this week
as I read and reflected upon
Mark's account of the calling of the first disciples.

They were Simon, Andrew, James, and John.
All of them were fishermen.
Jesus called them from the midst of their work.
There were no interviews,
no lengthy periods of preparation and learning,
no tests of what they knew and could do,
not even a polite, "I was wondering if you'd like to follow me?"

It's a request along with a promise.
"Come with me, and I will teach you to catch people."

The 'something deeper' that struck me this week
lay beneath these details of the story.
It had to do with the plot and pattern of the story.
There is a flow in how this story unfolds
that I think is worth noting.
First, Jesus offers belonging.
Then, he shapes believing.
Finally, he supports becoming.

That's the order of how things happen
in our encounters with God in Christ through the influence of the Holy Spirit.
We are invited to belong first.

In that community of acceptance and belonging,
we are gradually (at times dramatically) opened to seeing things different,
to recognizing that this community is a safe space to be honest
and a safe space to grow in wisdom and stature.

As our perspectives and ways of seeing things are changed,
as our world views are re-deemed (literally, re-seen)

by the work of the Holy Spirit,
we become someone different.
We become the flourishing person and the faithful people
that God intended for us to be.
That becoming never ends.
It is continuous growth into the image of God
and into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

This pattern or flow in the story
reflects what Cindy Johal found in her interviews with us
a couple of years ago
when she was doing her Master's program in leadership
at Royal Roads University in Victoria.

You will remember that she was seeking to understand
how trust was built that created the kind of collaboration
that generated a strong sense of community.
The first things everyone mentioned was the hospitality they received,
the welcome they experienced,
the sense of being accepted and appreciated
in and by the community.

It was upon that foundation
that they began to feel enough trust
to get to know the community and its convictions better.
Then they made the choice
to contribute to and collaborate with the community
more fully with their talents, time, and treasure.

It's a simple pattern or flow.
It's so simple, we often don't notice it.
We just take it for granted.
And when we take it for granted, it's easy to forget.
And when we forget it, it often doesn't happen
as powerfully as it should.

So, I wanted to remind us all this morning
of the importance and power of this pattern of being the church
here at Brentwood,
this flow of welcome, learning, and contribution,
of belonging, believing, and becoming.

That's not what I remember about church when I was growing up.
There is another, older pattern of being church
that was dominant 50 years ago
and that still shapes many of our assumptions today.

I grew up in a church that emphasized belief as a condition for belonging.
As a child, you were being taught what to believe and how to behave.

When you reached your early teens,
there was a concentrated series of sessions on the Shorter Catechism
with the minister.

I remember vividly sitting in Mr. McKeown's study,
especially the smell of his books,
listening to him read and explain the questions and answers.
I can't remember whether the exam was oral or written or both,
but we all passed.

The next Sunday, four of us who had grown up in that congregation
stood up at the front of the church
and "joined the church,"
as we called it in those days.

I didn't think much of it then,
or a lot about it since.

I had always been welcomed in that church community,
loved and nurtured and challenged.

I think that was what shaped the depths of my faith.
The beliefs arose as I became more convinced and clearer
about the power of the Love that welcomed me in the first place.

As I was studying these beliefs at a much deeper level at theological college,
I remember vividly coming across a quote from Karl Barth,
the most prolific theological writer of the 20th century.

His *Church Dogmatics* alone run to 8,000 pages and over 1 million words.

A reporter once asked him to summarize what he was trying to say.
Barth replied, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

Barth understood the flow of how God works in our lives.

The welcoming love comes first –
the acceptance and forgiveness.

Just as we are, we are invited to come.

In the safety and strength of that Love, then,
we come to understand and contribute.

When we belong and know it,
then we are freed from fear enough to really learn and live.

From the Love of God in Jesus Christ
flows the Spirit's work of helping us learn and the live in his service.