

**Lent 2011 at Brentwood Presbyterian**

**Children of the Light**

**April 3, 2011**

**Monthly Celebration of the Lord's Supper**

**Psalm 23 & Ephesians 5:8-14  
(Hymns –205, 282, 530, 563)**

Twenty years ago,  
I was in the midst of writing a history of Knox College in Toronto,  
the largest of the Canadian Presbyterian centres for training clergy.  
Let's imagine that I had an unlimited supply of research money  
(which I didn't)  
and that all of you were looking for jobs as research assistants.  
I hired you all  
and sent you off to the archives  
to look for important letters  
that would help me understand the way the college worked.

One of you discovered a very revealing letter,  
full of intriguing facts and figures,  
that indicated that a financial scam had cost the college  
millions of dollars,  
all of which had been covered up for decades.  
(Nothing like this actually happened at the college, by the way.)

But this is a funny kind of letter.  
There is no indication of when it was written,  
or who wrote it,  
or to whom it was written.

Without that kind of context,  
the letter is useless to me as an historian.  
It might very well be – probably is – the wild imaginations  
of a person with some kind of mental disease.

Luckily,  
the letters we have attributed to the Apostle Paul in the New Testament  
are clear in these matters.  
We are told who wrote them, to whom they were written,  
and where those persons lived.  
We can set the meaning of these letters in a clear context  
that helps us understand them more fully and deeply.

This morning's passage dealing with Christians  
as the children of light  
is attributed to a former narrow-minded religious bigot  
whose passion for the truth as he knew it  
led him to persecute and murder Christians.  
Then, the living Christ encountered him  
in a transformative experience.  
His name, following that change in his life, was Paul.  
This dramatic shift in his life  
centred on his realization through faith  
that God had re-established intimacy with humanity  
through the work of Jesus Christ  
and that that gift was made available to all  
through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.  
The primary instrument of this work was the church.  
Paul realized that his whole life  
was rooted in, grew in, fourished in  
his intimate relationship with God through Jesus Christ  
and that his life in Christ was constantly nourished by the Holy Spirit  
through the life and witness of the church.

This transformed person, living breath by breath *in* Jesus Christ,  
was writing to a church that he had founded in Ephesus.

Ephesus was second only to Rome in size and stature  
at the time this letter was written.  
It was a major centre of trade, religion, the arts, and government,  
with a population of 400 – 500,000 people  
drawn from around the known world.  
Every life-style you can imagine was thriving in this city,  
just as it is in Metro Vancouver today.

The stark contrasts drawn in the passage we read this morning  
- darkness and light, death and life, with Christ and without Christ -  
makes much more sense in that context.

The letter is urging it's readers to remember  
that they have been set apart by God thorough faith  
to be citizens of the kingdom of heaven,  
blessings to the world, light to the world.  
This letter is an urgent call to faithful engagement  
with this city as agents of the light of Jesus Christ.  
In Christ and with Christ,  
through the power of the Holy Spirit,  
Christians were to renounce the darkness of evil ways.

They were to live as people of the light,  
risen from death and shining with the radiance of God's love.  
They were to practice every kind of goodness, righteousness, and truth,  
renouncing those ways of life that distorted and destroyed  
what was pleasing to the Lord.

They were to be model citizens of the kingdom of God,  
faithful ambassadors of the light that came into the world in Jesus Christ.

As the first verse of chapter 5 urges,  
we are to imitators of God,  
beloved children who live in the love of Jesus Christ,  
being kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving.

In the midst of a city filled with darkness and evil,  
this letter urges Christians to be different,  
to let people see and know  
the quality of life that Christian faith makes possible,  
the light of life that shines forth when we choose to be *in* Christ.

The message is as true and powerful for us  
here in Metro Vancouver, in this neighbourhood of North West Burnaby,  
as it was for the church in Ephesus in the first century.  
Live in the light. Revel in the light.  
Be the light for our neighbours.  
Show them what flourishing in the grace of Jesus Christ  
really means.

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