

Co-Creating Natalie's Church

Brentwood Presbyterian Church

June 23, 2013

Matt 3:16-17 & Ps 121

(81, 521, 476, and 478)

This is a very special day for Natalie's families,
both biological and ecclesiastical.
We are delighted to welcome Claire's and Martin's families
to our Christian family here at Brentwood
and we thank them deeply for blessing us with their presence.

Teacher and spiritual director Henri Nouwen once wrote about Baptism:

Jesus offers us baptism as the way to enter into communion with God, Father, Son, and Spirit, and to live our lives as God's beloved children. Through baptism we say no to the world. We declare that we no longer want to remain children of the darkness but want to become children of the light, God's children. We do not want to escape the world, but we want to live in it without belonging to it. That is what baptism enables us to do.

This is a powerful insight into the meaning of what we have done here this morning.

We have promised to raise Natalie to be a Christian,
to be a disciple of Jesus Christ,
to support her in growing up as a beloved child and friend of God,
so she can be a blessing and a light in a world of curses and darkness.

You don't need a preacher to tell you
that this is a scary world in which to raise a child.

This morning, we took a strong stand against
the forces that generate fear and anger in our world
and make it such a dark, scary place.

We stated publically together that we will not allow
the darkness of the world that we so often experience
to define the ways we raise Natalie.

We have said "No" to leaving Natalie
to the mercy of the violence, hatred, oppression, economic and sexual exploitation,
strife, jealousy, envy, dissension, and bullying
that far too often dominates our relationships in this world these days.

This is the domain of darkness.

If we give in to this way of living,
if we leave the darkness of this world unchallenged,
then we abandon our vows to God, to each other, and to Natalie this morning.

Here's what the grace of God has led us to do this morning.
We have said "Yes" to modeling a different way of living,
the way of being a community of the followers of Jesus,
the way of being the church as a vehicle for God's energy in this world.
We stand in continuity with Abraham and Sarah
who were given by God this simple covenant:
"I will be your God,
providing you with security, acceptance, and power,
so you can be a blessing to this world."

That's the purpose of the church in a nutshell.

This is a community in which people are invited
to accept the unconditional love of God so they can bless the world.

This is the community in which people are invited
to experience and absorb the reality that God is with them,
so they have *nothing* to fear.

This is the community in which people are invited
to discover their true vocations as beloved children and friends of God.
As they accept that vocation, that way of being,
they are loving, joyful, peaceful, patient,
kind, generous, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled.
Those are the gifts of the Spirit
Paul associated with Christian freedom
when writing to the church in Galatia.
They are the qualities that enable humans to flourish.
These are the qualities of living that reveal the light of God in the world.

As we work and witness in these ways,
we are supported by the Spirit in revealing to the whole world
it's true destiny to be a place of blessed flourishing for all.
This morning, we renewed the covenant with Abraham and Sarah
that generates hope by provoking – calling forth - these gifts.

But how do we do that in this time and place?
How do we honour our vows and nurture these beloved children?

It boils down to paying attention to four things –
things that the church has been paying attention to
since the Holy Spirit got things going on that original Pentecost.

And if you ask church people now what they value most –
as I have been doing for 30 years now –

they have an instinctive sense of what the church best offers,
an emotional attachment to what the church best offers,
and an intellectual appreciation of what the church best offers.

The four things – activities, really – are what we do
to nourish souls to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ.
We will be faithful to our vows to Natalie
if we pay attention afresh to these four things.

In the language church people have used most frequently
over these past 30 years,
the four things are worship, learning, fellowship/belonging, and service.

These are the four things
that led organizational development expert Peter Drucker
to argue that the church is the most successful organization in Western history.
No other organization adapted and evolved as successfully
as the church for over 2000 years and in every region of the world.
It constantly found the guidance and wisdom
to move beyond old, ineffective ways of being a blessing
and developed new ways of doing the old things
that worked more faithfully and effectively in its current context.

That is our challenge today.
If there is to be a vibrant, accepting, flourishing
Christian community in which Natalie will be nourished
to flourish as a blessing in the world,
we will all have to engage in fulfilling the promises we made today..

That's **all** of us – every beloved child and friend of God
in the pews this morning,
as well as those who couldn't make it on this particular Sunday.
The church that will nourish this beloved child
will be co-created by all of us contributing those gifts of the Spirit
in our own unique way
to the flourishing of the church here in North Burnaby.

If we want this kind of supportive church to emerge,
we have to co-create it with the Holy Spirit,
with the presence of the power of Jesus in our midst,
right here at Brentwood Presbyterian.

No one else will do it for us.

We took the vows.

We've been equipped with the gifts.

We have all the support we need with God as our companion.

But **we** have to choose to nourish Natalie to flourish
in the grace of Jesus Christ.

In worship,
it involves being here to encounter and be transformed by Jesus Christ.
In learning,
it involves being curious about what we still have to learn about being blessings.
In fellowship and belonging,
it involves welcoming everyone as a beloved friend of God.
In service,
it involves blessing everyone you meet, including yourself,
with all those gifts of the Holy Spirit Paul wrote about in Galatians -
love, joy, peace, patience,
kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

These are the practices, the habits, the disciplines
that will enable us to grow into the constant love, the wholesome example,
the Christian teaching, and the faithful prayer
that we have promised, with God's gracious support,
to provide for Natalie in the congregation.

In developing and honing these practices even further,
there is one basic skill worth highlighting and that is conversation.
We co-create the future of everything through conversation,
one conversation after another.
Your voice creates a vibe that generates value.
What kind of voice, what kind of vibe, what kind of value
is your choice, again, one conversation after another.

We fulfill the vows taken this morning,
we co-create the church for Natalie,
by conversing lovingly with God, each other, and ourselves.
It's a simple skill. We all do it.

And now we've promised God, each other, and ourselves
to use it to weave a faith that matters in constant love, being a wholesome example,
offering Christian teaching, and being faithful in prayer.
Be assured that God is with us as we nourish Natalie
to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ.

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