

Memorize & Ponder

**Brentwood Presbyterian Church
September 29, 2013**

Confident in the Gospel

**Romans 1:16-17 & Ps 146
(565, 569, 575, 581)**

Alisdair Smith is a friend
who is an Anglican priest who does governance education
for credit unions across Canada.
In a recent leadership blog, he introduced me to the idea of FUD.
It's an acronym for Fear, Uncertainty, and Dread.
Alisdair thinks these qualities dominate our society.
I agree.
We are a FUDy people, especially in North America.

The ideas behind the acronym have an interesting history.
They originated in the field of sales and marketing
when Gene Amdahl left IBM in 1975 to start his own company.
He accused IBM salespeople of trying to scare potential customers
by spreading questionable information
about the unreliability of Amdahl products.
They intentionally fostered Fear, Uncertainty, and Dread.
Good things came if you bought IBM,
but dark shadows would gather if you bought Amdahl.

It's an interesting strategy for influencing decisions.
Politicians these days have learned and honed this approach to perfection.
"Vote for those guys and you'll create disaster.
I'm the only safe choice."

We're going to hear a lot of this kind of thinking
from politicians and commentators
over the next several months
as those inspired by hope
work at conversations to eliminate chemical weapons,
or nuclear weapons,
or economic crises,
or any of the multitude of things that threaten us.
The FUDys will play on our fears
and condemn these talks to failure before they begin.

If we want to be faithful to the God who brings *Shalom*,
the well-being that arises when the gifts of the Spirit are active,
then we have to see things differently.
We have to see things through God's eyes,
from God's perspective.

That's the transformation that began for Paul
In the dramatic encounter with Jesus, the Christ, on the Damascus road.
As he travelled throughout the Roman Empire
nourishing souls to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ,
he grew in his understanding of what his relationship with Jesus
meant for his attitudes and behaviours,
for the consequences of his presence in a community.
His sense of confidence in the power and presence of God,
seen most clearly in the work and witness of Jesus,
in the Gospel of Judging/Saving Word in our midst,
grew and matured.
He trusted what God had promises in Jesus, the Christ.
He saw it as the completion of the core covenant of Judaism –
“I will be your God so you can be a blessing.”
He relied on the Holy Spirit to inspire his words and actions
so they would embody and express God's desire for *Shalom*.

In our memory passage this morning,
found at the beginning of Paul's most complete expression
of how he had come to see reality,
he begins with the righteousness of God
and the need for faith to understand it.

The righteousness of God is the right order God desires in creation.
It's not a static way of living to which one must conform.
It's a dynamic process to which one contributes.
It's the divine dance of joy and delight
when all creation aligns with God's mission
of bringing well-being to the whole world.
We contribute by agreeing to the core covenant –
accept God's befriending of us so we can be blessings to the world.

That's a tall order.
We can't do it on our own.
We can only do it in reliance on God's grace
revealed most fully in Jesus, the Christ,
and working among us through the activity of the Holy Spirit.

But that's the promise of the Gospel.
That's why we can have confidence in the Gospel.
That's what Paul is really getting at in this passage
written for the Christian community in the capital city of the empire.
They were a persecuted minority,
ignored by many but seen as a threat by the powerful
because they refused to accept the imperial norms.
They imagined a different way of being,
a different set of social norms,
a world built around the values of
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity,
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
In Christ, they were free from conformity to FUDy laws,
developed in a climate of fear, uncertainty, and doubt.
In Christ, they were free to live out all those values of *Shalom*
in confidence that the Gospel revealed
what was really real.

I've been reading this week
Canadian author Timothy Findlay's *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (1984).
It's a wicked and raunchy retelling of the story of Noah and the Flood.
I found a wonderful line that provoked me all week
as I was pondering this text.

"Fear is nothing more than a failure of the imagination."

The Gospel compels us to imagine a different world,
a world ruled by love, aspiration, and faith.
Seeing the world through those lenses
opens up possibilities of blessing that remain hidden and hampered
when we look at the world through fear, uncertainty, and doubt.
Love, aspiration, and faith
cast out
fear, uncertainty, and doubt.
Instead of FUDy, we're LAFy.

That's the kind of confidence that this world desperately needs.

*May God fill you with love, aspiration, and faith this week
as you go forth to bless the world.*

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