

Being the Church at Brentwood

Entrusted with the Gospel

Psalm Ps 147 & 1 Corinthians 9:16-23
(Hymns – 358, 374, 534, 556)

February 5, 2012

There is a line in Psalm 147
that captures the attitude Paul has
as he writes to the church at Corinth.
Remember, Paul is writing to help these people
be the church in and for Corinth.
He is instructing and encouraging this fractious community
in the ways to best honour and serve God in Jesus Christ
through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The line is in vs 11:
*[God] takes pleasure in those who honour him,
in those who trust in his constant love.*

Other translators used the word *fear* or *understanding*
for *honour*,
and *faithful care* or *goodness* for *constant love*.

The point is that Paul knows
deep in his soul
something that pumps through his heart
to every other part of his being.
He knows that God's constant love, faithful care, and goodness
is with him and for him in every moment of his life.

This is the strength upon which Paul draws in his ministry –
not his own, but God's.
There is a simple and direct dependence here on God's grace and mercy.
There is an understanding that his life is a gift from God.
There is a joy here in being able to live that life in gratitude for that gift.
There is a sense of duty that his life is not his alone, but God's.
He owes the vitality of every part of his being to Jesus Christ.
From that sense of deep gratitude
arises his sense of duty
to witness to and work for the Gospel.

In doing so, he is following the orders of grace.
The power of grace is so compelling for Paul
that he feels he has no need to make a choice.
The conviction that he is filled with,
literally *lives in* God's constant love in Jesus Christ,
is so compelling that his entire life is devoted
to making it known to others.
That's how he can best be the blessing
Jesus Christ has called him to be in the world.

Paul was entrusted with the Gospel.
He experienced its grace,
was grasped by its mercy,
was transformed by its power,
and was compelled to devote the rest of his life
to sharing this good news with others.

Responding that that sense of thankful duty
brought him into challenging circumstances –
ridiculed, rejected, run out of town,
jailed, sick, and disabled.
He allowed none of this to be a barrier
to the privilege of preaching the good news.
God has entrusted him with making the Gospel known,
of extending the invitation to meet afresh
and follow Jesus Christ.

That's what Paul is doing
throughout his correspondence with the Christians in Corinth.
He's reminding his brothers and sisters in Christ
of the riches God has given them in Jesus Christ
and what it means to live in gratitude for them in the power of the Spirit.

To live that kind of gratitude for the grace of Jesus Christ
is to live under the law of Christ.

Here's one of the foolish scandals of the Christian faith.
We normally think of *law* as imposing duty
with overwhelming force backing it up.
There are lots of *musts* and *shoulds* attached to understanding of law.
And lots of Christians still have that attitude to the Gospel.
Follow these rules and you'll be a Christian.

God's law in Christ is different.
It is a gift, not an imposition.

It's the gift of a loving, good, constant, faithful God.
It's the gift of a God who is faithful to his promise
of a peace and prosperity rooted in a relationship with him
in Jesus Christ through the loving work of the Holy Spirit.

This is the kind of law you love to follow
because it's the way of human flourishing.
It's the way of being everything that God created you to be.
It's the way of fulfilling your deepest desires.

It happens in everything you do as a human being.
And it is nurtured and nourished in communities like this,
like Brentwood Presbyterian Church,
where people from far and wide, from east and west and north and south,
gather together for worship, learning, fellowship, and service
in true gratitude for the life that comes
through being with and in Jesus Christ.

This is a small, but growing, congregation
that does the Gospel simply.
There are not a lot of programs.
We worship together, all of us singing, praying, and learning.
We study God's written witness to God's living Word in Jesus Christ.
We enjoy each other's company over lunches and special dinners.
We find varied ways of serving our neighbourhood –
the Mitten Tree at Christmas, the suitcase campaign for migrant workers.
We are slowly, but surely, freshening up our sacred space here in the sanctuary.
We do this because we have been, like Paul, entrusted with the Gospel,
with the good news of God's constant and faithful care and love.

That's what we want you to experience here.
That's what brings us back week after week.
That's what we celebrate and share with everyone we meet.

God feeds us for that mission
at this table around which we gather this morning.
We celebrate the Lord's Supper here at Brentwood every month,
On the first Sunday share the symbols of Christ's body and blood
and remember the depths to which God went to save us.

Come, let us taste and deeply feel how good God really is.