

Hark the Glad Sound

***“You Come the Broken Heart to Bind
The Wounded Soul to Heal”***

Hymn 118, Malachi 3:1-4, and Luke 3:1-6

Brentwood Presbyterian Church - December 6, 2009

There are a lot of broken hearts and wounded souls in this world.

If it is true
that you get people’s attention
by identifying with their pain,
then it is important that a community of the friends of Jesus Christ,
like Brentwood Presbyterian,
be sensitive to the brokenness and woundedness
of this world,
especially here in our own neighbourhood.

I spent this past week in Washington, DC,
attending meetings of the board
of the Alliance for Nonprofit Management
and visiting friends.

The Alliance is a national voice and catalyst
for advancing the field of capacity building
in organizations that strive for positive social change,
organizations that seek to bind broken hearts
and heal wounded souls
in a wide variety of ways.
I’ve been involved with it
since I began my consulting and coaching business in 2002.

Among the friends I visited
were Bill and Kay Phillippe.
We’ve known each other for over 30 years.
We first met when we were all delegates
to the Caribbean and North American Area Council
of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.
Bill is a retired minister and
Kay is a retired senior administrator
in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

Bill and I spent a fair bit of time
talking about the exciting possibilities
here at Brentwood.
He outlined an interesting understanding
of the roles the church plays
in its communities and neighbourhoods
that I found helpful for thinking through
how I hear the voice of God
in our texts this morning.

He said that the church has 4 important functions
and that what is important is the flow
among all four.

If one is missing or weak,
the others will be thrown out of wack.

The flow of their impact
will be interrupted.

The congregation will not be representing
the power and presence of Jesus Christ,
will not be the Body of Jesus Christ in the world,
as our Lord intended.

Here are the 4 functions:

a **sanctuary** in which people encounter transcendence in worship;
a **hospital** in which people encounter empathy for healing;
a **college** where people engage in dialogue and learning; and
a **base camp** in which people are prepared to be sent out in mission.

As a **sanctuary**, the church offers a place for people to meet Jesus Christ,
to be introduced to and come to know
the One in whom the love of God
is so powerfully incarnate,

the One in whom grace and truth became flesh among us.

The church is a place when people rest
and open themselves to a power other than themselves,
where they are drawn out of their isolation
and attracted into relationships with others
and, above all, with Jesus Christ.

In and through this rest and these relationships,
they discover who they are truly called to be,
the reason God created them,
the calling and vocation they have to be a blessing to this world.

As a **hospital**, the church offers healing.
It consciously creates a community
in which people can safely acknowledge

their brokenness and woundedness.
It is a place to sort out what is their responsibility and what is not.
In this place they can find support for accepting forgiveness.
They can move through and beyond their pain and suffering
to a new phase of their lives.

They will be strengthened and supported
in this relationship with Jesus Christ and his people
as they live out their purpose in and for the world.

As a **college**, the church offers a place of learning,
a “school of faith,” as John Calvin put it.
It is a community in which we can teach each other,
entering into dialogue with each other
about what God is doing in and for our lives.

We believe fervently that God,
through the inner working of the Holy Spirit,
is a work in each and every one of us,
bringing us to a deeper and broader understanding
of what it means to live as the beloved friends of Jesus.
Sharing with each other what we are learning
in that process is what our conversations are about,
especially when we gather in Bible study.

As a **base camp**, the church is staging area
for the deployment of Christians in mission.
Following the announcement of 30,000 new troops
for the war in Afghanistan this week,
I was listening to Charlie Rose interview
the head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the American military.
They spoke for several minutes
about the logistical challenges of moving that many soldiers
into an arena of combat.

While I am certainly suggesting that the church is at war with the world,
I so think there is a parallel here
in the seriousness with which we take the task
of preparing people to be agents of Jesus Christ in the world,
engaged in work that binds broken hearts and heals wounded souls.
We are the ambassadors of Christ,
ambassadors of healing,
ambassadors of learning the arts of peace and reconciliation,
ambassadors of the restoration a relationship with Jesus Christ will bring
to those who earnestly and truly desire
to be blessings to others.
In church, we prepare people
for those kinds of ministries.

In my years in the parish and in church education,
I've seen people get stuck in their brokenness and woundedness.
They have reduced the faith to their binding and their healing.
Thank you, Jesus, for doing this for me.
I am saved.
That's all that matters.

That's not what Jesus and his church are all about.
That's not why Jesus came to bind the broken heart
and heal the wounded soul.

Bill's conceptualization of the functions of the church
is a much fuller picture of the reason
Jesus Christ came into our midst –
to provide a community in which rest and restoration can take place,
to provide a community in which continuing healing and rehabilitation
can happen,
to provide a community in which the knowledge of God
can be engaged and enriched, and
to provide a community in which people are prepared
to serve in tough conditions
that constantly seek to wound and break the human spirit.

I have always found that one of the most binding and healing experiences
is a good family meal -
people gathered in love to serve and nourish each other.

That's what happens every time we gather for communion,
to celebrate the Lord's Supper,
as we do this morning.

The church as sanctuary, hospital, college, and base camp
all comes together and flows through this family meal,
celebrated by Jesus Christ with his beloved family and friends.
Hearts are bound back together and souls are healed at this table.

Come, my friends.
Let us experience together just how good the Lord really is.