

Being the Church at Brentwood

Into the Light

**Isaiah 25:6-9 & John 20:1-18
(Hymns – 248, 243, 247, 260)**

April 8, 2012 – Easter Sunday

I have no idea what happened on that first Easter
between the crucifixion and the resurrection.
Something that only God comprehends
happened in the dread darkness of the tomb
that changed the world.

The light of life, learning, and laughter -
the light of flourishing life,
the light of compassionate learning,
the light of delightful laughter –
that light of God's presence stayed alight
and emerged alive.

We've been exploring throughout this Lenten and Easter season
about the light of the Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit –
continuing to shine in the midst of the darkneses in this world –
the darkneses of dread, of despair, of dismissal, of death.

They can seem so overwhelming.
They can become so encompassing.
All too often, we allow them to define reality for us.
We become blind to the light within and about us.

Then, often in subtle ways,
God reminds us of Easter.
It may be a word or a phrase.
It may be a gesture.
It may be look.
It may be a sight.

Whatever the means, God reminds us of the light
that could not be extinguished by any form of darkness humans could devise.

In the dread darkness of the tomb,
God generated life eternal for the creation.
Death lost. Life won.
It is the mystery and the marvel of Easter.

Jesus returned to the light
with the unique light of God's love shining through his being.
The light of his love
draws all who hunger and thirst for flourishing and abundant life
into a compassionate relationship with God
through Jesus Christ
by the influence of the Holy Spirit.

That is the church's witness.
That is what we offer to the world.
That is what nourishes souls to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ.
That is what Brentwood, and every other missional church worthy of the name,
do in and for the world.
We point to and live out with the Spirit's help
the light of God's love in Jesus Christ.

I mentioned at the beginning of these reflections on Jesus' resurrection
three dimensions of this light of God.
I'd like to highlight a bit more their significance
for our witness here at Brentwood.

There is the light of flourishing life.
We've talked a lot about this at Brentwood over the past couple of years.
It's life that is infused and informed
with the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit –
in Galatians, it's the freedom to love,
be joyful, be patient, be kind, be good,
be faithful, be humble, and discipline yourself.

Wayne Reid and I were chatting yesterday
about what's really important for a congregation.
He is a very wise person
and I've been blessed by that wisdom as we've gotten to know each other.
He said, "It's the relationships that are key.
It's the welcome and the support and the care.
It's the way we live with and for each other."
Then he added, "Like what happens at Brentwood."

It is good to remind ourselves frequently about what Cindy found in her research.
The foundation people here value for their contributions
to the flourishing life and witness of Brentwood
is the welcome they receive –
initially and then week after week.

Then there is the light of compassionate learning.
People, regardless of race or class,
are not only welcomed but also challenged.
They are challenged to change according to the light of the Gospel.
Jesus Christ invites us and enables us to grow into his likeness.
He incorporates us into his being
so that we can be his body in the world.
We are invited continually to learn to be compassionate
as Jesus was compassionate.

We've had the power of compassion highlighted for us in Vancouver
with the recent visit of Karen Armstrong.
She is a prominent scholar and writer about spiritual traditions
who has launched a movement around The Charter for Compassion.
It's on the insert in your bulletin this morning,
along with the website where you can follow the evolution of the movement.
[read the charter – cf. p.4]

The more we learn to be this kind of community,
a community dedicated to the light of compassion,
the more we will enlighten the darkneses around us.

Finally, there is the light of delightful laughter.
This is laughter that arises from the soul,
from that place within us where the Holy Spirit resides
and works for our delight through compassionate flourishing.

It's the laughter we hear downstairs over lunch.
It's the laughter we enjoy when we are moved by acts of compassion.
It's the laughter that delights when we see or hear a thing of beauty.
It's the laughter that a child or grandchild can inspire.
It's the laughter that dispels the darkneses of dread, despair, and death.

On that first Easter morning, Jesus walked into the light with his light,
a light that is stronger than any darkness we can imagine.
Because of that, we can awake every morning
assured that the light of God's love
shines within us and through us
as a witness to the power of Christian flourishing.

May our Easter celebration in 2012
revive your confidence in and service to this kind of light.

The Charter for Compassion

The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.

It is also necessary in both public and private life to refrain consistently and empathically from inflicting pain. To act or speak violently out of spite, chauvinism, or self-interest, to impoverish, exploit or deny basic rights to anybody, and to incite hatred by denigrating others—even our enemies—is a denial of our common humanity. We acknowledge that we have failed to live compassionately and that some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion.

We therefore call upon all men and women ~ to restore compassion to the centre of morality and religion ~ to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate ~ to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions and cultures ~ to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity ~ to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings—even those regarded as enemies.

We urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.

Learn more at www.charterforcompassion.org