

Getting to Know Jesus, the Christ

Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Mar 2, 2014

Launching the Public Ministry

Mark 1:14-15 & Psalm 2

(625, 761, 530, 556)

It took guts to start out this way.

The authorities were clearly on the alert
and feeling threatened by those with whom Jesus identified,
like John the Baptist.

There is real sense here,
at least in Mark's mind,

that Jesus is taking up the mantel of John's prophetic ministry –
preaching the good news of the arrival of the Kingdom of God.

In that preaching, there is the announcement of that fact
and the invitation to let the Spirit of God turn your life around
and make you a citizen of God's realm,
God's commonwealth,

in which relationships are designed
with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in mind,
the things in which God delights.

(Jer 9:24)

Citizens of the Kingdom of God
see reality differently.

At the heart of reality is a compassionate God
who loves human beings so deeply
that he will take flesh, suffer for their sakes,
and create a new path to flourishing.

That path is a way of being human
that consents to God's original intention –
intimate communion with God,
loving communion with other human beings,
and appreciative communion with our true selves.

That three-dimensional communion
is what characterizes life in the Kingdom of God.

In our contemporary political parlance,
it's more of a democractic commonwealth
in which righteousness leads to equity and justice for all.

Now, let's face it.
That is not the world we live in.
Equity and justice for all
is a hopeless dream
given the ideologies that dominate politics and economics
around the world these days.

That's why this text is so striking and challenging.
Jesus whole public ministry
is focused on the declaration
that God not only delights in,
but has also brought about,
a new community in which his original intent will be realized.
It is a community in which love of God,
love of others, and love of self,
align with and reinforce each other
so that the citizens of this commonwealth
can bless the world
in ways that will attract new citizens
who see their wildest dreams of flourishing
realized in relationship to this God.

Winston and I were exploring this text together at Bible Study on Friday.
He remembered a dimension of Jesus' teaching
that I had not connected with this text,
but I now think it does.

One of the central activities in the Kingdom of God,
as it is lived and modeled by Jesus and his disciples,
is eating and drinking together.

It's gathering around a table and having a meal.

They do it with outsiders,

with those the authorities consider 'impure.'

They go into the highways and byways to invite all who hunger
to come and be filled.

They often talk about it as a wedding feast,
a celebration of an especially intimate covenant,
the most intimate in human experience.

To be with God in this commonwealth
is like being married to God.

And that is cause for celebration!

I grew up in a church that had a gloomy view of the Lord's Supper.
Elders dressed in their best dark suits.
They looked very somber filing down the aisle to distribute the bread and juice.
The music was almost funereal.

It wasn't until much later in my Christian formation
that the joy of the Lord's Supper
became apparent for me.

The origins of the supper was at the time of the crucifixion,
and the memory of that sacrifice remains important,
but the purpose of the supper is to celebrate the Kingdom of God,
to delight in the gracious community that Jesus inaugurated,
to be fed for flourishing in the service of God, others, and ourselves.

This is the wedding feast of the Commonwealth of God.
In it we celebrate the reenergizing of the covenant –
God will be our God so we can be blessings.
Humans flourishing in faith is what delights God.
That's what we celebrate at this table the first Sunday of every month.

Listen with fresh ears to the communion prayers this morning.
We use the same prayers every month
because they capture so well the reasons for celebrating –
God's compassion care for the people of the earth
and his special care for those called to bless them
into the Commonwealth as citizens.

This is the meal that nourishes us for witness,
for our own unique journey on the path that Jesus walked in his day.

As we continue to explore that path in the weeks ahead,
getting to know Jesus, the Christ, better,
may the nourishing Spirit guide our steps and shape our lives.

Written and delivered by The Rev. Dr. Brian Fraser, Brentwood Presbyterian Church, Burnaby, BC