

Being the Church at Brentwood

Living Together in Harmony

**Ps 133 & 1 John1:1 – 2:2
(Hymns – 248, 350, 727, 376)**

April 15, 2012

I have great admiration for the writer of these letters,
1st, 2nd, and 3rd John.
What I admire most
is the how well he talks about his faith.

I'm not sure we do that all that well in our time and place.
I think we might learn some lessons
from a careful look at John's approach.
What does he talk about?
How does he talk about it?
What results does he expect?

And if we are going to be the church of Jesus Christ here at Brentwood,
if we are going to patiently but powerfully
invite people to enjoy the Gospel with us,
then we need to keep on learning
about how we can best talk about our faith with others.

The author is a church leader in Asia Minor,
what is now the eastern 2/3 of Turkey.
As was often the case among those early churches,
there are differences within the community
about belief, spirituality, and conduct.
The same is true for churches in our day.

What seemed to happen then, and I find still happens now,
is that the contending parties have adopted one of two positions.
They are either very lax, almost indifferent, about matters of belief and conduct
or they are very rigid and fixed on a particular way of believing and behaving.
Both forms of extremism make it very difficult
for people who have had different experiences of God's love in Christ
to live together in harmony.
Such tensions destroy both the focus and the faithfulness of the church.

This is what the author of these letters talks about so eloquently.
What is the faithful focus of our life together?
What brings harmony into the life and witness of a Christian congregation?

The bottom line, for the author, is the light of God's love in Jesus Christ.
This is the Word or the Relationship that makes sense of the world.
This is the Word or the Relationship that created and sustains life.
This is the Word or the Relationship that completes our joy.

So, what we talk about, first and foremost,
is what God is doing in and for our lives.
That's how the author starts these letters.
The Word of life that is Jesus Christ
has given him the joy of eternal life.
Eternal, as used in the New Testament,
has a much richer meaning than simply the duration of time.
It also points to the vital energy that fills that time,
the glory of God in the energy of the Holy Spirit
that brings to us the possibility of being in and like Jesus Christ.

What makes sense of life for the Christian is the light of God's love.
What creates and sustains life is the light of God's love.
What completes our joy in life is the light of God's love.
And that light is seen most brilliantly in Jesus Christ
through the loving instruction of God's Holy Spirit.

The church is a community
in which that kind of instruction and learning happens.
We talk about how the light of God's love in Jesus Christ
has brought joy and contentment into our lives
so that we can be a blessing by sharing that love.

It's a pretty simple message.
But it comes in such a rich variety of forms.
It has such a rich variety of impacts.
It generates flourishing in such a rich variety of ways.

As we learn more and more about the ways in which God's creation works,
we are continually amazed at the complexities of God's vitality and energy.
No single human being, no particular group of human beings,
can comprehend these complexities well enough to say with certainty
that this or that way to belief and behave is the absolute truth.
Over and over again, the witnesses to God's work in the Scriptures
caution their readers, and us, to be humble in our understanding.
The Spirit has more to teach us.
We see through a glass darkly.
God will not be defined and confined by our fears and prejudices.
God will be who God will be.

So, we talk about our experiences
of the light of God's love in Jesus Christ.
But we are always humble enough,
teachable enough,
to listen for the experiences of others.
We are seeking community, not conformity.
The harmony we strive for is the harmony of learning together,
enriching each other's understanding,
of the breadth and depth of God's love for humanity and the creation.
Different notes and tones combine to produce a rich and resonant sound
that envelops the soul with the light of God's love.

But to do that, we must talk about our faith with each other.
And as we learn to talk about our faith with each other,
we will become practiced in talk about our faith
with those outside the church,
those who would benefit from a community such as this
in which to be nourished to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ.

There are several opportunities here at Brentwood
to continue to improve our abilities to talk about our faith.
Lunch after church is a good time.
Our Bible studies and youth evenings are good times.
Participating in the conversations we are inviting on the website
through comments on the sermon text for next Sunday
is a good way.
Singing our faith together is a good way.
Caring and supportive visits with friends is a good way.
The opportunities are many.

What we talk about, then, is the vital energy
that flows through the light of God's love in Jesus Christ.

How we talk about it is as varied as we can imagine.

But we do need to test and try.
We do need to actually talk about our faith.
We do need to support each other
as we find the words and tones
that harmonize with our experience of God's love in Jesus Christ.
The Spirit will help us improve,
but we need to try.