

## Being the Church at Brentwood

### Love, Light and Living

Psalm Ps 107:1-3 & 17-22 and John 3:14-21  
(Hymns – 205, 189, 177, 765)

March 18, 2012

Light in the midst of darkness,  
real, deep darkness,  
darkness that depresses and drains the energy of life,  
and the light cannot be extinguished.

Light in the midst of darkness,  
real, deep darkness,  
darkness that depresses and drains the energy of life,  
and the light gradually but persistently dispelling the darkness.

Light in the midst of darkness,  
real, deep darkness,  
darkness the depresses and drains the energy of life,  
and the light gradually but persistently reveals the possibility of eternal life.

These are the themes that run throughout John's gospel.

They are there in the prologue.

*[The Word/Relationship] was the real light – the light that comes into the world  
and shines on all humankind.*

They are there in the conclusion.

*As the sun was rising, Jesus stood at the water's edge,  
but the disciples did not know it was Jesus.*

It is this light, filled with the grace and truth of God's love,  
that gives abundant and eternal life  
through the relationship disciples have with Jesus Christ.

The judgment talked about in our text this morning  
falls upon those who choose,  
for whatever complex set of reasons,  
not to live in this light of love.  
They choose to be drained of the energy of life by the darkness.

It is not a judgment imposed by an angry God,  
But a judgment that follows choices made  
by people who choose the darkness over the light,  
who choose anger and hatred over love,  
who choose depression over life.

These choices are complex.  
In the midst of the deadening darkness, we often feel we have no control.  
We are the victims of forces that overwhelm us.  
We become drained and discouraged.  
We turn to artificial aids to lift us up –  
alcohol, drugs, sex –  
anything that seems to help us grasp for an instant the energy of life.

But they don't work.  
After a glimpse of life, we come down into an even deeper pit of despair.

One of my best friends from the time we were teenagers  
has struggled with depression for years now.  
He was a very successful business person in Toronto.  
Now he lives on government assistance of \$1200/mth.  
I don't think I've been a very good friend to him over those years.  
I couldn't figure out a way to help him.  
Everything I tried, he ignored or rebuffed.  
I got tired, discouraged, and distant.

Then I was re-reading one of my favourite books.  
It's by Parker Palmer and is called *Let Your Life Speak*.  
Palmer has gone through 3 periods of severe depression in his life.  
He writes about them with great power and wisdom.

On p. 63, I was confronted with this quote:

*One of the hardest things we must do sometimes  
is to be present to another person's pain  
without trying to "fix" it, to simply stand respectfully  
at the edge of that person's mystery and misery.*

A little further on, at p. 71, there is this revealing admission:

*One of the most painful discoveries I made  
in the midst of the dark woods of depression  
was that part of me wanted to stay depressed.  
As long as I clung to this living death, life became easier;  
little was expected of me, certainly not serving others.*

So I try now to stay in closer touch with my friend.  
We had dinner when I was back in Toronto  
and I saw the small social housing unit in which he now lives.  
We talk on the phone more often.  
Sometimes he's groggy and withdrawn,  
so the call is only a few minutes long.  
Sometimes he's brighter and more lively,  
so the call lasts half an hour.  
And I'm learning just to be with him,  
as a light of living love.

I think the darkness in this world  
works its deadening power in subtle ways.  
It distracts from what's important.  
It disorients us from the truth.  
It depresses us by hiding the light.

The only answer comes not from us, but from God.

It's witnessed to in the text we read this morning:

*For God loved the world so much  
that he gave his only Son,  
so that everyone who believes in him  
may not die but have eternal life.*

The light of God's love brings life to those who live in it.  
Through them, through us,  
and this is where these insights are so important for being the church,  
that light is seen and experienced in the world.  
The quality of our resilience in the midst of darkness,  
of our living out the results of the work of the Spirit,  
is made possible by the light of God's love in Jesus Christ.  
When we are, by God's enlightening embrace of us,  
Loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, humble, and self-controlled,  
then we are light in the darkness  
as the people of God in the world.

In its very essence, that's what it means to be the church here at Brentwood.  
That's the light that infuses and shines forth  
from our worship, learning, fellowship, and service.

Let's be diligent in inviting others to enjoy living in this light of love.