

Words Forming Witnesses

**Psalm 30 & Psalm 145:10-13
(Hymns – 625, 635, 644, 650)
April 14, 2013**

Making God's Deeds Known

How do people get to know about Brentwood Presbyterian
and what we have to offer?

We do need to give this question
some serious thought as we strive to co-create a flourishing future
for this congregation and its mission in this neighbourhood.

Our text this morning might provide some help
in discerning a faithful response.

Psalms 145-150 are called the Daily Hallel
in Jewish devotional practice.
They are recited every day in the morning service.

Psalm 145 is particularly prominent in those daily devotions,
probably because it is so comprehensive
in its references to the beneficial impact of God's deeds.

The psalm reminds its prayers
of the mighty acts of God and of God's majestic energy
throughout all creation.

Indeed, the whole dynamic of creation –
everything that exists and interacts –
is praising God for sustaining this rich diversity of flourishing life.

By joining in that praise, then,
human beings take up their unique role as stewards in God's creation.

They acknowledge God's authority as the author of creation
and agree to play their role of blessing all things in that creation.

They agree to live in God – as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -
to participate in God's faithfulness and graciousness.

So, the whole point of God's mighty deeds
is to realize the vision of a peaceful kingdom,
of a diverse but coherent community,
in which everything that exists works together
for the glory of God.

What Brentwood Presbyterian has to offer
is a local manifestation of that diverse but coherent community
in which everything works together for the glory of God,
everything meshes into a witness to the flourishing
nurtured by faith in Jesus Christ as the source of our grace.

We gather to participate in the kind of praise this Psalm expresses –
a fervent praise that recognizes the breadth and depth of God's love
for us and our place in this creation.

Out of that praise arises a desire to learn –
to learn more about this God's deeds,
to learn more about how those deeds transform our lives,
to learn more about how those transformed lives
can be shaped and guided to bless the whole of creation,
one gracious and beneficial deed at a time.

In our praise and learning,
we find a sense of belonging and fellowship
that meets our deepest needs for connection,
for being part of a community.
In that community, we are connected
with God, with others, and with our selves.
Indeed, our praise acknowledges that connection
and our learning deepens our appreciation of that connection.
We find support, stimulation, and strength
in being in community.
It is our true space of flourishing.
The dis-ease we feel when we disconnected and isolated
is a powerful sign that being in community
is God's desire for humanity and creation.

Out of these three things
that happen most powerfully when we gather to praise, learn, and belong,
arises the energy to go into the world and serve.
Service is the consequence of the attitudes and behaviours
nourished by the grace of Jesus Christ in Brentwood Presbyterian Church.

If the melody of the Christian faith is service -
God's service to us followed by our service to God -
then the rhythm is one of gathering and going,
and the harmonies are improvised as we invite others to join us
in this delightful dance of God's energy or glory.

That's what we have to offer, by God's grace,
here at Brentwood Presbyterian Church.

But we do have to consider how we make all of this known.
It's not *all* up to us.

The Holy Spirit is active in the world making God's deeds known.

But we do have a crucial role to play –
accepting God's grace, praising God for this gift,
learning what to do with it,
belonging to a community of faith that nourishes us to flourish in this faith,
and living so that people can see the benefits of God's grace.

The Mission and Ministry Committees of the Presbytery of Westminster
are planning an event for this fall -

Saturday, Nov 2, is the date we are aiming for –
in which we will convene conversations
about evangelism in the missional church.

That's what we have traditionally called
the acts of making God's deed known – evangelism.
It's a crucial part of being the church.

Some of the ideas we will draw on for that day
have been generated by Martha Grace Reese.
She is the coordinator of the Mainline Evangelism Project
funded by the Lily Foundation.

They have worked with over 1,000 congregations in North America
to discover the best ways to make God's redemptive deeds known.

The four key findings of the project thus far are:

1. If we know **why** to do evangelism, we'll figure out how to do it.
2. Faith sharing arise out of vibrant relationships with God.
3. It is important to learn to talk about our faith.
4. When it flourishes, evangelism is a high priority for pastor, congregation,
and individuals.

Evangelism, for Reese and her colleagues,
“is anything you do to help another person
move closer to a relationship with God,
or into the Christian community.”

I think that's a great 'core chart' for evangelism.
It focuses our attention on God and the Christian community,
the church as the Body of Christ
within which people are nourished to flourish.

But it also leaves open a lot of options for how to help this happen.
That's where our improvisations in our unique context
come into play.

God's not telling us precisely what to do.
God's inviting us to co-create with the Holy Trinity
a variety of ways of inviting people to flourish in the Christian faith
and supporting them as they make those decisions.

The initial act is deceptively simple.

Invite people to join you at church.

It's as simple as inviting them to come and enjoy your favourite restaurant,
or come to a movie that you think they will enjoy,
or a play,
or the symphony,
or a jazz group.

The key to all of this is to know why you enjoy it.
How can you tell another about the reasons you enjoy this event –
the eating together, the conversation, the message, the inspiration.
All of those are part of your experience of church.
You keep coming back week after week,
so there must be some deep satisfaction that is being generated here.
But how can you find the words to point to it
then use those words to invite others to enjoy it?

That's the challenge God poses in this memory passage.
It's a challenge I think we should consider more deeply
over the coming weeks and months.
New people have come to Brentwood in the past couple of years.
Many worship, learn, and enjoy fellowship with us on a regular basis.
We'd love to see more.
But that will only happen if we learn even more
about how better to invite and encourage people to enjoy
the flourishing that arises from being nourished in the grace of Jesus Christ.

We have all experienced that.

But can we learn to talk about with greater clarity and confidence and joy?

I think so.