

## **Being the Church at Brentwood**

### **Modeling the Way of God**

#### **Ps 133 & 2 Corinthians 6:1-13**

**June 24, 2012**

**300/303, 624, 626, 634**

Let's take a moment  
and remember who is writing this passage.

His name at this point in his life is Paul.  
We've come to know him  
as the great apostle who provided inspiration and guidance  
as the early church spread throughout the known world  
in the first century following the Christ event –  
the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ  
in and through which God began the final stage  
of his desired redemption of the world.

Prior to his life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ,  
Paul had gone by the name of Saul.  
He was born in Tarsus, raised in Jerusalem as a Pharisee,  
and trained by Gamaliel, a leading figure in the Sanhedrin at the time.  
The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of the Jewish people,  
charged with interpreting and enforcing the Law  
to protect the integrity and authority of Judaism.  
By the time of Jesus and Saul,  
the Sanhedrin was legislating all aspects  
of Jewish religious and political life  
within the parameters laid down by  
their interpretation of Biblical and Rabbinic tradition.  
It was a bit like Parliament and the Supreme Court  
wrapped up in one.

Saul became a zealous persecutor of the early church,  
seeing the Christian movement within Judaism  
as a powerful threat to his faith and his community.  
In a time when Judaism needed to defend its principles and people,  
any questioning of the authority of the Law was to be crushed.

Then came Saul's dramatic and controversial call to be an apostle,  
to shift from persecuting to propagating the Gospel and its missionaries.

Saul became Paul.

The energy and enthusiasm  
he had focused on eliminating the Christian movement  
was now refocused on spreading it.

The restrictions of the Law are now interpreted through the freedom of the Gospel.  
The Law is no longer a means of controlling and confining people,  
but a means of understanding the nature and will of the God  
who freely saves and redeems out of love for his creation  
in the work and witness of Jesus, the Christ.

Given the prominence of Saul in persecuting the early church,  
then the dramatic, miraculous change that took place  
as he became a leading apostle in spreading the early church,  
we can imagine the suspicion and animosity  
that must have been felt among some within the early church  
for this suspicious turncoat.

He had switched parties.

He had taken for himself a position of authority,  
claiming Christ's authority in doing so.  
Opposition and resistance to his person and work  
was to be expected.

That's a big part of what lay behind the tensions and conflicts  
we find discussed in this morning's passage  
from Paul's Corinthian letters.

In the face of those internal conflicts in the early church,  
Paul defends his call and claim to be an apostle,  
to be passing on faithfully and effectively  
the reconciling message and meaning of the Gospel,  
the good news that Jesus Christ redeemed the creation.  
Fear and death are defeated.

Freedom and flourishing life are gifts to be enjoyed.  
God has blessed the world by reconciling it to himself in Jesus  
and we are to live out that reconciliation in everything we do.

That is the way of God.  
Accept the gift of reconciliation,  
just as Saul did on the road to Damascus,

and be joyously transformed into a new creation.  
Become, by God's grace, a reconciling force  
in a world torn apart by anger, conflict, oppression, and killing.

That is the way of God.  
We embody the reconciliation achieved in Jesus Christ,  
we live in Christ for the world,  
by living like Paul,  
by living lives of purity, knowledge,  
patience, holiness of spirit,  
genuine love, truthful speech,  
all through the power of God's Spirit.

Many years ago,  
I was interviewed for a call to St. Andrew's, King Street,  
a large church in the heart of downtown Toronto.  
The only part of the interview I remember  
is when one of the elders asked me,  
"Do you see yourself as Paul?"  
I can't remember my answer.  
I do know I felt it was fumbling and inadequate.

Were any of you to ask me that question today,  
I would be much more ready for it.  
I'd answer "Yes"  
and go on to explore further with you  
the dynamic we've been talking about this morning.

Here is a man whose life is turned around by an encounter  
with God in Jesus Christ.  
He leaves behind a life of fear, anger, hatred and violence.  
He does not allow himself to be defined by  
the weaknesses and ailments of his earthly tent,  
nor by the attack ads of his opponents.

Instead, he is confident, in a strangely humble way,  
of the grace God has shown him in Jesus Christ.  
He is modeling, with God being his helper,  
the way of faith, hope, and love,  
with the greatest of these being reconciling love.

Is there a place in your life, in our life together here at Brentwood,  
where a better modeling God's way of faith will make a difference?

Is there a place in your life, in our life together here at Brentwood,

where a better modeling God's way of hope will make a difference?

Is there a place in your life,  
is there a place in our life together here at Brentwood,  
where a better modeling of God's way of reconciling love will make a difference?

I know there is for me.

And I suspect there is for you as well.

So let's prayer for and support each other  
in this coming week  
as we remain open for the ways God is leading us  
into opportunities to model his way of flourishing love  
in and for the world.

And we conclude our reflections this morning  
with the confidence that God will embed these truths  
deeply in our souls.

Written and preached by the Rev. Dr. Brian Fraser  
Minister with Brentwood Presbyterian Church, Burnaby, BC