

**Newly, truly, God's Word feeds us,
Rightly leads us, life bestowing.**

'How brightly beams the morning star'

Hymn #180, Jeremiah 31:7-14, and John 1:1-18

Brentwood Presbyterian on Jan 3, 2010

In one of the leadership newsletters I get,
Carson Pue, President of Arrow Leadership,
quoted lines from a poem used by King Edward VI
in his Christmas address in 1939,
just on the eve of the Second World War.

The poem was written by Minnie Haskins (1875–1957) and published in 1908.
She was a potter's daughter and brought up in Warmley, near Bristol.
She taught Sunday School at the Congregationalist church there.
She studied at the London School of Economics from 1918-20
and later tutored in its social science department.

Here are the lines the king quoted from her poem, "God Knows."
These lines were also read at the funeral of the Queen Mother in 2002.

*I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year,
"Give me a light
that I may tread safely into the unknown."
And he replied,
"Go out into the darkness,
and put your hand into the hand of God.
That shall be to you better than light,
and safer than a known way."*

I think these are wonderful lines to take into 2010 with us
as we explore together what kind of flourishing future we can provoke
here at Brentwood Presbyterian Church.

Our future is unknown.
We enjoy tremendous opportunity
and face sobering challenges,
largely focused on how we attract enough people
to join us in our mission and ministries here at Brentwood
to become a sustainable congregation.

But we do move into the future
with our hands in the hand of God.
That is the source of our hope and confidence.
God has given us opportunities,

resources to explore the best ways of using those opportunities,
and a tenacious enthusiasm that will carry us through
the tough conversations and decisions that lie ahead.

I do have one minor quibble with the theology of Ms. Haskins' poem.
I don't think God's presence is 'better than light.'
I think God's presence in Jesus Christ,
the presence we just celebrated at Christmas,
is our light.

I am convinced that Jesus Christ will enlighten us as we go forward.
Jesus Christ will be our guiding light.
If we keep that in mind,
constantly asking ourselves what we think Jesus Christ would do,
then we will make wise decisions
shaped by the Holy Spirit working within us and among us.

Last week I had the privilege of preaching at the Taiwanese service.
Our continuing conversations with them
about possible ways of combining resources
to the advantage of both congregations
will be a major focus for us in the coming year.
Our agreement with BTPC comes up for renewal in April this year.
Our session hopes to meet with their leaders in January
to move the negotiations around a joint future forward.
In preparation for that,
I wanted to let their congregation know what we had decided this fall
as we prayed and talked together about Brentwood's future.

I preached from the parable of the talents
and focused on how we could use our gifts and serve Christ together.

Here is a bit of what I said,
just so you know how I was interpreting
Brentwood to Burnaby Taiwanese.

*The people of Brentwood bring a legacy of savings and facilities
that will enable us to attempt and assess
a variety of strategies
for growing as a congregation of Jesus Christ's beloved friends.*

*The people of Brentwood bring a tenacious spirit
that has withstood some testing times
and live that spirit with grace and hospitality.*

The people of Brentwood bring a willingness to try new things,

*to enter into new relationships,
to find pioneering ways to build up their church
in mission and ministries.*

*The people of Brentwood bring a sharp business sense
of how to protect their interests and care for their resources
so they can serve in the ways to which Christ is calling them.*

And that brings me to our carol text this morning,
in this last in the series of sermons
I have been preaching on powerful phrases
in the poetry of Christ's coming:

*Newly, truly, God's Word feeds us,
rightly leads us, life bestowing.*

The coming of Jesus Christ,
God taking flesh and dwelling with human beings on this earth,
is the most convincing argument I have ever run across
that God is willing to do new things to accomplish his eternal purpose.
God's intent that this world be a joy and blessing
is consistent and steadfast
throughout all the twists and turns of humanity's encounter with God
recorded in the Scriptures.

What is clear is that
God works in the concrete context of human life
as we live it,
here in this neighbourhood,
at this time in our congregation's history,
with this set of opportunities and challenges before us.

God weaves his influence,
most clearly revealed to us in Jesus Christ
and constantly present with us through the work of the Holy Spirit,
into our daily lives.

God's steadfast purpose of bringing life bestowing joy and blessing
through the quality of love we experience in Jesus Christ
is woven into the fabric of our concrete life in this time and place.

Our decisions in the next year
will witness to our faithfulness to God's ability to do a new thing
in us and through us
here at Brentwood Presbyterian Church.

Nobel-winning Albert Einstein had a wry but wise
definition of insanity –

doing the same thing over and over again
and expecting different results.

We have to change in order to flourish.
It's a truism in our personal lives,
our professional lives, and
our church lives.

Redemption is offered in Jesus Christ
to free us to flourish,
to encourage and enable us to continually reform our lives
to achieve more faithfully
the new humanity revealed and inaugurated
in Jesus Christ.

We will think through together just what those changes will be
here at Brentwood Prfesbyterian Church
as we invite new members and adherents
to get centred in Jesus Christ in worship and learning,
enjoy community with Jesus Christ in fellowship, and
experience the compassion of Jesus Christ in service.

They will involve two things
that are sometimes hard, but now necessary.
We will have to spend some of our money
to let people in this neighbourhood know what is going on here
and why they would benefit from joining us.
We will also have to engage in genuine dialogue
with our sisters and brothers in Christ
in Burnaby Taiwanese Presbyterian Church
to understand first their aspirations,
then clarify with them our aspirations,
then explore a variety of options
for meeting those aspirations together,
then decide how we will move forward.

Throughout both of these processes,
we will walk with our hands in the hand of God.
We will be open to letting God's Word,
seen and understood most clearly in the person of Jesus Christ,
feed us and lead us
newly and truly
into the future God intends for us.
We know it will be a future of flourishing
in glorifying and enjoying the fact that God is with us.
And we know we have to create it ourselves with God.

It will not just happen.
It will take prayerful and careful thought and action on our part.

Rising to the opportunities and facing the challenges
God has provided here at Brentwood
requires that we be constantly nourished and fed
by God's Word, Jesus Christ.

I am grateful that this congregation
has established already a tradition of monthly celebration
of the Lord's Supper.

At this table, we are fed by God's Word.

Our host is Jesus Christ himself,
present in the working of the Holy Spirit,
forming and reforming us to serve God
ever more faithfully, effectively, and wisely.

So come, let us eat together.

Let us taste and see that the Lord is good
and that we are secure with our hands in those of the Lord.