

Memorize & Ponder

**Brentwood Presbyterian Church
September 1, 2013
The Lord's Supper**

The Breadth of God's Love

**John 3:16-19 & Ps 112
(305, 321, 530, 556)**

I had some interesting pastoral conversations this week.

They spanned a spectrum of situations
from fear, to confusion, to depression, to doubt.

I won't break confidences by going into the details,
but I'm sure everyone here
has had their own versions
of these kinds of human experiences.

I know I certainly have.

At their core, these experiences have one common feature –
they all involve losing touch with
the gift of eternal life that is given to us in Jesus, the Christ.

Another way of saying that is that they all involve
looking for eternal life -
its security, affection, and power -
in all the wrong places,
in places that do not have the ability
to satisfy the true depths of these human longings.
We ignore the essential relationship in which those needs are met,
that is, our relationship with the God
we find revealed in Jesus, the Christ.

We were created to flourish with all the gifts of eternal life
in relationship with the God who brought us into being,
and life is difficult when that relationship is not recognized and nurtured.

I reflected on the flow of those conversations.
They moved from listening, to curiosity,
to more listening, to clarifying,
to more listening, to exploring possibilities,
to more listening, and to decisions.

Throughout the conversations,
I felt the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit,
moving within and among both of us,
helping me to listen, to suggest, to encourage, to support
and helping the other person to express, reconsider, reframe, and rise up.

I realized that that's the flow of God's relationship with us.

A lot of listening,
then curiosity about what's happening,
then clarification about what's possible,
then exploration of the benefits of particular possibilities,
and finally support for decisions that will bless the world.

If we become more and more aware
of these kinds of conversations with God
throughout our life –
in every dimension of our existence –
we will enjoy more fully the gift of this relationship with God
that was restored to its fullness in Jesus, the Christ.

It will turn our fear, confusion, depression, and doubt
into the flourishing that happens
when we step with joy into the eternal life
God freely offers to the whole world.

Now, please understand.
I'm not suggesting these transformations are easy,
or quick, or simple.
They usually involve expert help
from those who understand
the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual dimensions
of these human experiences.
I'm simply witnessing to the truth that God is a work in all of this,
whether we acknowledge it or not,
and that our enjoyment of the flourishing of eternal life
comes through a conscious and respectful relationship with Jesus, the Christ.

Throughout John's Gospel,
the apostle emphasizes how important this relationship is.
It is a gift, unconditional in its offering by God.
But we do have to decide to receive it.
We do have to make the choice to believe
this God would do this
and that trust in this gift is the way to faithful flourishing.

God keeps offering and nourishing us to flourish
in this love that casts out fear, confusion, depression, and doubt.
But to experience the full benefits of this redemption,
this invitation to see things differently,
from God's perspective,
we have to listen and learn and live it.

What we do here at Brentwood,
week after week,
is provide a space in which that listening, learning, and living
can be nourished by the Spirit of Jesus, the Christ.

We worship together, we learn together,
we befriend each other, and we serve all those we encounter in our lives.

John said it powerfully –
“God so loved the world...”
the whole world.
That's the breadth of God's love
and it is not without our proper power to restrict it.
We continually try, mind you,
but such efforts often lead us into fear, confusion, depression, and doubt.

There are no restrictions on who gets to enjoy
these life-enhancing activities.
There are no restrictions on who gets to come
into this community where lives are being transformed by God's love.
There are no restrictions on who is accepted
as a beloved child and friend of God
here at Brentwood.

Being that open to the breadth of God's love is a challenge.
We need God's help to be that open.
We need the nourishment to flourish in this way
that is provided at the Lord's Supper
as we commune with Jesus, the Christ, at his table,
set for all the world that God loves so deeply.

So, let us gather around the table
and be fed by God's love.

*May the Spirit take these ponderings
and provoke in all of us
a witness of love and good deeds.*

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