

Being the Church at Brentwood

The Enduring Love of God

Ps.85 & Isaiah 40:1-11
(Hymns –119, 248, 161, 110)

December 4, 2011 – Advent 2

One of the most dramatic differences between our times and the times in which the books of the Bible were written and compiled is our attitudes towards God.

In our times,
the key question, if it remains a question at all,
is whether God exists.
More and more people seem to be answering that question
with an increasingly confident “No.”
The reasons for that are complex
and we don’t have time this morning to into them.
Suffice it to say that secularism –
the rejection of all religious faith and practices –
is spreading rapidly,
especially in the urban centres on the west coast of North America.

In Biblical times,
the key question was which God are you worshipping.
Most people, as far as we know, believed in a god or gods.
They said “Yes” to religious faith and practices.
Differences revolved around whose God was most powerful,
around whose interpretation of God was most authentic and true.

The Judeo/Christian tradition
witnessed to **the** God who created all that is
out of a love that sought additional companionship
for his ongoing pleasure and delight.
God created the universe out of love and saw it was good.
He created men and women out of love in his own image.
He created human beings to be stewards of the creation,
a little less than divine, but with an awesome responsibility.
Humans were called to be loved companions with God
in realizing the purposes of God.

Those purposes can be summarized
in the Hebrew word for “peace,” – Shalom.

As Douglas Todd wrote yesterday in his column in the *Vancouver Sun*,
the peace of this God has an edge to it.

It is not passive tranquility.

It is an active and enduring love.

It provokes a world-wide community of respect and justice.

It welcomes the stimulating challenges of diversity
and invites all humans to work with each other for the peaceable kingdom,
the Kingdom of God.

Peace comes as our lives together are inspired and shaped
by the enduring love of God.

Without being conscious of that love, as our passage this morning testifies,
without the constant inspiration of God in sustaining life,
we wither and die, like parched grass.

With a growing awareness of that love, we flourish.

With a growing understanding of the enduring Word of God,
seen most powerfully in the work and witness of Jesus Christ,
we experience the encouraging hope
that comes from God's good news,
news that he has come to forgive and save.

We are forgiven for our misguided efforts
to live in ignorance or without this God who is the source of life itself.

We are forgiven for our misguided acts
driven by fear of a death that this God has overcome in Jesus Christ.

We are forgiven for our misguided thinking
that we flourish fully without being what this God calls us to be –
stewards of **his** blessing throughout the worlds he has made.

A big part of the good news the Scriptures testify to
is the nature of this God

who acted in human history to choose a particular people –
first Israel and then the Church -
to be his companions in bringing to be the Kingdom of Peace.

The power with which this God rules and rescues
is the power of a loving shepherd.

It is the power of gentle mother who gathers us into her arms
and care deeply for us with an enduring love.

Our wanderings and witherings only intensify that love.
They sadden the heart of this God and draw forth a restorative forgiveness,
an enduring love that continues to pursue us
with the renewed invitation to step into our true destiny
and be the blessings we were created to be.

To be the church in this secular age
is to boldly and persistently proclaim this good news –
to testify that the earth is the Lord's and that we flourish by his grace.

This God takes the initiative in coming to people,
in going out from his heavenly home and touching people in the flesh.
To be the companion of this God –
indeed, to be the body of this God -
we cannot simply sit in our sanctuaries and wait for people to come to us.
We must take our faith and our flourishing
out into our communities -
in the ways in which we live our lives,
in the compassion with which we invite people to consider our faith,
in the clarity with which we witness to Jesus Christ,
in the enduring love we show in everything we do.

This seems, at times, an impossible task -
too much responsibility, too little strength, too many failures.
But we are not alone in this effort.
We are accompanied every breath of the way by this God's Holy Spirit.
That Spirit encourages us, educates us, empowers us
to be the blessings that God created us to be.

That, in essence, is the good news of God's love.
It is for us and it is enduring.
This love overcomes his periodic disappointment and anger
with our wanderings and witherings.
It leads this God to continually invite us back home to his table
and rejoice when we return.

This enduring love of God
is what we celebrate at the Lord's Supper.

Come, let us feast together
on the nourishment of God's enduring love.

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