

Searched by the Psalms Series at Brentwood

July 18, 2010

The Reality of Evil

**Psalm 52 & Luke 10:38-42
(Hymns 730, 708, 698, 672)**

I am intrigued by the ways we try to avoid
taking seriously the reality of evil in our lives.

I can understand it.
Who wants to face that kind of reality?
Who wants to confront,
as Paul so honestly does in Romans 7,
the fact that we do the evil that we do not want to do?

Psalm 52 confronts some specific forms of evil in those days –
tongues that are sharp as razors,
trust in wealth rather than God,
seeking security in the fruits of being wicked,
boasting about these attitudes and behaviours.
Such evil surrounds and infects us all these days as well.

I think politics these days,
at least the political dynamics that hit the press,
is dominated by sharp, negative tongues.
Everything has to do with how the other parties have it wrong,
what they are doing or not doing to ruin the community.
It seems the political fortunes of the party
are far more important than the common good of the community.
It is almost impossible to find a forum for dialogue
about what possibilities would best serve the flourishing
of the whole world-wide community
of humanity and its earthly habitat.
It's all about plans to ruin others
who we see as threats to our power and privilege,
be they political parties, pressure groups,
the nations of the 'evil empire',
or terrorist movements.
We label those with whom we disagree
as workers of treachery,
as liars and deceivers who hurt and devour.
Politics appears to be a negative and nasty business these days,
dominated by razor-sharp tongues.
This, says the Word of God in the psalm this morning, is evil.

The world of managing great wealth seems little better.
The more we discover about the complex dynamics
of our current economic circumstances –
and I don't claim to understand much of it –
the more it appears that great wealth for many is an end in itself,
something that justifies unprecedented risk and greed.

The growing gap between rich and poor,
whether between people, regions, nations, or continents,
enriches a few and impoverishes millions.

Those who make the decisions that drive the system
sow the seeds of injustice, suffering, and sorrow.

Wealth has become their god,
their first loyalty.

If they are in the United States,
they will complain bitterly about the new regulations passed this week
to protect the broader community against their worst decisions.

And they will continue to worship wealth,
seeking the most lenient jurisdictions in which to pursue their greed.

This, says the Word of God in the psalm this morning, is evil.

When it comes to those who seek security in the fruits of being wicked,
my mind goes immediately to the drug lords
and their elaborate networks that are poisoning nations.

Again, I don't pretend to understand fully
the complex dynamics of the drug trade,

but its exploitation and destruction of lives is evil.

I have a good friend who once worked in Afghanistan
trying to convince farmers to grow wheat rather than poppies.

It was a relatively well-funded United Nations program.

The farmers could actually make more money growing wheat.

The problem was that they were paid to grow poppies before the harvest.

They were not paid to grow wheat until after the harvest.

And the drug dealers threatened to kill them if they grew wheat.

The program met with little success.

This, says the Word of God in the psalm this morning, is evil.

The examples we've used thus far deal with big issues and big decisions,
evil that has a broad impact.

But there is evil that has a deep impact on us as well,
evil that is closer in origin and effect.

Sharp, negative tongues

can poison our personal and professional relationships.

The worship of wealth can twist our principles and practices.

Insecurity and fear can distort our perceptions and priorities.

Faced with such overwhelming evidence of the reality of evil,
what is a Christian to do?

The Psalmist has an answer.
I am convinced that it rings true.
Let's take a closer look.

First, the ultimate solution to this kind of evil is in God's hands.
Out of God's steadfast love and faithfulness,
God will deal with the evildoers.
Ultimately, they will be ruined.
Their way of life will produce only suffering, fear, exile, and death.
They will reap the same fruits they are creating for others.

Second, we are urged to choose to put our roots down
in the rich soil of God's everlasting love and faithfulness.
We are earnestly invited to trust in God's love forever,
to give thanks constantly for what God has done for us,
and proclaim the goodness that flows from a relationship with God
to all that we meet.
We are encourage to confront the reality of evil and choose God.

By being centred in Jesus Christ, enjoying companionship with Jesus Christ,
and experiencing the compassion of Jesus Christ,
we trust in and are loyal to the true source of goodness in the world.
We believe in the very depths of our souls
that the reality of evil,
overwhelming as it may seem,
is not the last word or the only way.
There is a word more powerful, a way more fruitful.
It is the Word of God in Jesus Christ.
It is the way of Spirit who enables us to follow Jesus Christ.
It is the gift of flourishing life that is a blessing to the whole creation.

The choice is ours – faith or folly, life or death.
The Psalmist is clear about his choice.
And I trust we are as well.

Written and preached by the Rev. Dr. Brian Fraser
Minister with Brentwood Presbyterian Church
1600 Delta Ave., Burnaby, BC
www.brentwoodpc.ca
brianfraser@shaw.ca