

## Being the Church at Brentwood

### The Secret Revealed

Ephesians 3:1-12  
(Hymns – 480, 43, 687, 655)

January 8, 2012

Let's begin by clearly identifying the secret.  
It isn't a secret any more.  
It's been revealed and known,  
by some at least,  
for the past 2000 years.

The secret this passage is talking about  
is that the infinite riches offered by a loving God  
so that humans might flourish as blessings  
to other humans and to the creation  
have been offered in Jesus Christ  
to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews.

Let's be clear what this means.  
The salvation offered by this loving God,  
from the calling of Israel in the covenant with Abraham  
to the initiation of the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ,  
is a life of service to God, others, and ourselves.  
It's the great commandment –  
love God with your whole being and others as yourself.  
In relationship with this loving God in and through Jesus Christ,  
everyone is empowered and energized to do this.  
Salvation is living this kind of flourishing life – now and eternally.

It's the kingdom happening now,  
as we worship together,  
as we engage each other in conversation over lunch in a few minutes,  
as we take the inspiration and wisdom of this gathering  
into our lives this coming week.  
And it's the promise of this kind of flourishing continuing eternally,  
in the company and community of the Holy Trinity.  
That kind of flourishing life – humanity fully alive –  
is now available to everyone.

As we are singing in our Hymn of the Month this January,

*In Christ there is no east or west,  
In Him no south or north;  
But one great fellowship of love  
Throughout the whole wide earth.*

*In Him shall true hearts everywhere  
Their high communion find;  
His service is the golden cord,  
Close binding humankind.*

*Join hands, companions in the faith,  
Whate'er your race may be!  
Who loves and serves the living God  
Is surely kin to me.*

*In Christ now meet both east and west,  
In Him meet north and south;  
All Christly souls are one in Him  
Throughout the whole wide earth.*

It is this sense of oneness in Christ,  
of no divisive barriers within a loving human community,  
that challenges so much of what was happening  
at the time Ephesians was written.

Sadly, it challenges so much of what is happening today.

Maybe it's still a secret after all.

A lot of us are still acting as if it is.  
We're still acting as if race and background divides us.  
We're comfortable with our own kind,  
with those who are the same, or at least similar, to us,  
with those we understand and with whom we agree.

But the Gospel is not about comfort.  
It's about being confronted, and converted, and consoled.  
It's about being confronted by the radical and challenging Love of God.  
It's about being converted by that Love  
into a more fully flourishing being.  
And it's about being consoled with the deep healing  
that comes when we are bold and confident agents of the glad news  
of this loving God's rule over all creation.

So, don't come to church  
for the comfort of being with your own kind.

Come to church for the confrontation, conversion, and consolation  
that comes from faith in and union with Jesus Christ.

Being the church here at Brentwood,  
and in every other church that is faithful to this revealed secret,  
means gathering together every week  
to be challenged to change according to the glad news of the Gospel.

That glad news is that a loving God is ruling this world,  
in spite of all appearances to the contrary.  
That glad news is that this loving wants his church,  
those who have chosen to live in and be guided  
by presence of Jesus Christ,  
to witness to this fact and bless the world with his Love.

On Friday evening, at Bible study,  
the Spirit led us into a discussion of prayer.  
What would prayer look like  
if we understood it and practised it  
from the perspective of this text,  
from the confidence this text encourages  
that this loving God revealed in Jesus Christ  
is actually the governing force in the unfolding of human history?

For one thing, there would be a lot fewer 'gimme' prayers –  
gimme this, gimme that, gimme more of this and less of that.  
Rather, our prayers would focus on aligning ourselves  
with the power and flow of God's love  
in every situation we encounter in our lives.  
They would be prayers focused on having in us the mind of Christ.  
They might well still use the language of give me this or give me that,  
but this and that would be focused on serving the kingdom of God.  
Give me the wisdom and strength  
to give myself in your loving service.  
Give me the confidence and boldness to witness to the open secret  
of your Love for the whole creation in Jesus Christ.  
Give me the humility to let the Holy Spirit work in and through me  
to be a blessing to everyone I meet this week.

With that kind of prayer, and the flourishing lives that will be supported by it,  
the church here at Brentwood will be bold and confident in its witness.  
We will embody and reveal the secret of the breadth of God's Love.