

Being the Church at Brentwood

There was a man ...

Ps 48 & 2 Corinthians 12:2-10

July 8, 2012

476, 764, 760, 775

I went back to school last week.

It was Summer School at Vancouver School of Theology.

The course was on the missional church.

It was taught by one of the pioneers in this movement,

Darrell Guder from Princeton Seminary.

I have 23 pages of notes to review and digest.

This morning's sermon is the beginning of that process.

There are a couple of basic truths Guder reminded us of.

First, the old Christendom days
when we figured that we only had to ring the bell,
or extend the invitation in some other way,
to get people coming to fill the church
are gone forever.

We cannot return to those good old days.

We have to work with God to discern and develop
a renewed way of being church
in a world that is very different

from the one in which those who built this church 50 years were living.

Second, there are intriguing and refreshing patterns of being church
throughout the Scriptures that provoke our imaginations
to discover new possibilities
and design new forms of being God's people
that will *witness* afresh to the Gospel in our neighbourhoods.

And that the key word for Guder – *witness*.

The church exists for one primary reason.

It has one primary mission

and that is to be a *witness* to what God has for creation in Jesus Christ.

Witnesses show and tell with credibility what has happened and is happening.

The good ones are authentic and authoritative.

They are genuine, sincere, accurate, and convincing.

Now, the whole process of witnessing in our day and age is complex
and I will come back to explore it more fully
in the next several weeks.

The point I want to make today,
reinforced by this past week spent with Guder and my fellow students,
is that the church's primary reason for being is to witness
to what God has done in Jesus Christ for the redemption of creation.

We don't exist for ourselves.
The church is not an end in itself.

We exist to serve God as witnesses in the world.
We exist to witness to God's grace in Jesus Christ by being blessings.
We exist to nourish souls everywhere we encounter them
in the grace of Jesus Christ.

And that brings us to Paul and the passage we read this morning
from the compilation of writings that we have in 2 Corinthians.

Paul's authority as an authentic witness has been attacked.
He is defending himself against these challenges.
It's not something he's comfortable doing,
but he sees it as necessary for the mission of the Corinthian church.

His primary concern is that they be a credible witness to the Gospel,
to the good news that in Jesus Christ God reconciled the world to himself
and restored the original covenant of being their God
so they could be a blessing.

It's not a question of getting their pains or diseases cured.
It's not a question of looking cool or competent in their world's terms.
It's a question of relying on Jesus Christ
in order to be formed as a witness to his Gospel.
It's a question of relying on Jesus Christ's promise
that his grace is sufficient
to provide the resilience to find and use opportunities
to be a witness by being a blessing.

Paul's consistent purpose
in writing to these early Christian communities
is to form them for witness to what God is doing in Jesus Christ,
to shape their attitudes and behaviours
so that their neighbours can see
what flourishing life could really be like
when people led lives worthy of the Gospel.

As I listened and learned this week,
I was encouraged by what we are doing here at Brentwood
to become a more missional congregation.

We are seeking to use the abilities God has given us
to gather for formation and go out to witness.

We are serious about discovering ever more deeply
what it means to be disciples of Jesus Christ
in this time and place
and welcoming others to do that with us.

We are intentional about being a community
in which people are nourished to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ.

We are confident that the reign of God
is breaking into the world
and that we are ambassadors who witness to that reality
in everything that we do as we live in this world.

It is important that we see and engage in everything we do
with these purposes forming our intentions and actions.

And here's a reminder of what we're working on
over and above what we are already doing
to witness to God's grace in Jesus Christ.

We are offering opportunities
to learn to engage more faithfully in the Christian disciplines of life.
Next Saturday, for example,
we are offering the workshop on prayer with Glenn Ball.

Seolgi is helping us organize our community service projects –
our second year of doing the suitcase campaign,
a new initiative in collecting diapers for Dixon House,
and expanding the scope and impact of our Community Faith & BBQ.

We are planning a series of musical concerts this fall
under the heading of 'Gospel Nights'.

We are moving Jazz Vespers to Saturday afternoon at 4:00PM
to provide an alternative day and time for people to gather in worship.

At Winston's suggestion,
we are preparing a series of memory verses
to help us learn more fully the foundations and features of Christian discipleship.

With Leah, we are refining our approach to ESL through Music
to incorporate an element of learning the basics of the Christian faith.

To do these things in ways that are worthy of the Gospel
will take the prayers and work of all of us and others
pooling our energies and talents
to bless the world in the name of Jesus Christ.

If we, like Paul, believe that the grace of Jesus Christ
is the only true source and sustaining power of our faithful witness,
we will enjoy glorifying God long into the future.

*Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will use these reflections
to provoke us all to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ.*

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