

## **Being the Church at Brentwood**

**Union with Jesus Christ**

**Ps 24 & Ephesians 1:3-14**

**July 15, 2012**

**476, 345, 373, 375**

Jill and I still read the paper every morning.  
It's a bit of a waking up ritual.  
Most mornings, I'll check the sports first –  
what happened yesterday and what's coming up today.  
Then I'll skim through the various sections,  
reading the headlines to see if there are articles that attract my attention.  
Then I'll go back and read those articles.

I also scan the advertisements.  
It's hard to miss them.  
They take up much of the paper.  
A lot of the ads deal with ideas and practices  
that promise you a better life.  
Take this supplement and feel better.  
Do these things and you will be wealthy, or wise, or healthy,  
or all three at once – and very quickly.  
There are all sorts of groups out there  
making loud noises and impressions  
that promise to provide you with the secret to flourishing,  
to leading a full and meaningful life.

The Christian church no longer holds a place of privilege and power  
in this marketplace of salvation,  
in this shopping mall of spiritual options,  
in this catalogue of ways to flourish.  
Many of us can remember when it did,  
when it was the dominant option  
for providing spiritual meaning and guidance in our society.  
But not any more,  
at least not in this part of the west coast of Canada.  
Christians are a diminishing minority.

It's a hard adjustment for most people in the mainline churches –  
those denominations some call the "sidelined" churches.

But it does give us much more in common with the New Testament churches than we have had for centuries.

They were small communities scattered across the Middle East and beginning to appear in the major urban centres of Europe.

They were being called to witness to the Gospel in cities that were indifferent or hostile to the good news that God had saved the world in Jesus Christ. They had been gathered together by the work of the Holy Spirit. They met in small groups to be formed for witness through praise, prayer, instruction, discussion, and mutual support.

They were sent out from those gatherings to live lives worthy of the Gospel in everything they did – in their marriages, as parents, as neighbours, as business people, as servants, as citizens.

From time to time, an opportunity arose to give an account of the hope that was within them, to tell someone of the reason they were living such flourishing lives, to invite someone to come and see, come and hear, come and experience the impact that the love of God in Jesus Christ has when the Holy Spirit energizes your whole being through faith in Jesus Christ.

Those are the kinds of communities that this circular letter we have begun exploring this morning were written for.

Ephesians is not a personal pastoral letter for a specific community, like the Roman or Corinthian letters.

It is a general epistle written for several of the early churches. The words “in Ephesus” show up in very few of the ancient manuscripts.

Likely, there was a blank there in the original to be filled in by the reader in that particular community.

The content of the letter is also different.

It contains many passages, like the one we read this morning, that likely come from early Christian worship documents – prayers, hymns, or instructions.

The purpose of these letters is to provide a summary, a reminder of what Christians believe and how Christians behave. They were written to form Christians for their witnessing in the world.

In the 11 verses we read this morning, the compiler of this letter pulls together a hymn of praise to what God has done for the world in Jesus Christ.

The themes are powerful, inspiring, and comforting.

First, this is all God's plan,  
part of God's purpose from the very beginning,  
something that Jesus and the Spirit have been involved in all along.

Second, the Gospel, the good news,  
is that we have been united with Jesus Christ by the Spirit's action  
and that in that union we have been given every heavenly blessing.  
We have been reconciled to God according to the plan completed in Christ.

We have been made God's people.  
Christ is our head and we are his body.  
God's great grace has made us holy.  
God will not hold our sins against us.  
We are no longer slaves to our pasts,  
but free to be God's agents and witnesses in the world  
by being blessings wherever we go.

Third, our mission is to bring God's hope to the attention of the world.  
In the midst of the confusion of claims  
by a multitude of voices promising various forms of salvation,  
we learn to witness ever more faithfully  
to the real salvation offered through Jesus Christ and his church.  
In union with Jesus Christ, we continue his hopeful work in the world.

Fourth, and finally, the results of all this witness  
are not ours to control.  
We are responsible for being the witnesses,  
for telling others how we see things.  
The Holy Spirit is responsible for the results.  
It is not ours to figure out the times when or the means by which  
God will reconcile people to himself  
and draw them into the community of Christ's church.

Ours is to extend the invitation, provide the welcome,  
offer the worship and learning and opportunities to serve.

God provides the guidance and strength to do that in Jesus Christ.  
So, let's just do it together.

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