

Using Talents and Serving Christ Together

Matthew 25:14-30

Dec. 27, 2009, at Burnaby Taiwanese Presbyterian Church

I consider it an honour
to be in this pulpit preaching in this congregation.
I have long respected
the way Presbyterianism took root and blossomed in Taiwan.

As a Canadian church historian,
I knew something of the work of George Leslie MacKay
in the early days of Christianity in Formosa.
One of the people I studied in some depth,
the Rev. James A. Macdonald,
was the publisher and editor of MacKay's
From Far Formosa.

I have also had the privilege of working with
Vancouver Taiwanese Presbyterian Church
as they worked with Kerrisdale
to create a new partnership in serving Christ and his Gospel.

What I have experienced with my Taiwanese sisters and brothers in Christ
is a willingness to be pioneers in serving the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

They go new places,
plant new churches,
find new ways of serving Christ and building his communities
to offer the riches of His grace.

When I begin to work with a congregation,
I ask them three questions.

1. What do you value most about what this congregation offers you?
2. What does this congregation do to provide that value?
3. What are the most crucial challenges this congregation faces?

I asked that of Vancouver Taiwanese and Kerrisdale.
I asked that of Brentwood.
I hope to be able to ask that of Burnaby Taiwanese in the near future.

But here is what I heard from the others.
I suspect the answers will be similar.

What people in these congregations value most are
worship and learning, fellowship, and service.

Let's focus on the folks at Brentwood for a minute.

We value the opportunity to accept God's invitation
to gather in worship week after week
to open ourselves to the leading of God's Spirit
in the paths of serving Jesus Christ.

We greet, we pray, we sing, we listen for God's Word,
and we recommit to go out in mission
to love and serve the Lord.

We value the opportunity to meet each other
in fellowship as a family of faith.

We care for each other, support each other,
encourage each other,

and recognize each other as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

There is no East or West, no male or female,
no racial superiorities,
no class distinctions.

We are all the beloved children of God
in community with each other.

We value the opportunity to serve Christ by serving others.

We make our facilities available
to the children in the neighbourhood
through the Montessori school
here during the week.

We collect clothing to keep people warm,
food to nourish the hungry,
clean up trash to make the neighbourhood safe,
provide space and encouragement for new congregations,
like yours,
seeking to grow in their wisdom and stature in serving Christ.

We have resources that have been gathered
over the past 48 years of our history in this community –
facilities, finances, people, and a tenacious spirit,
all dedicated to making ourselves a helping presence
in and for this community.

In the parable we read from Matthew this morning,
'talents' are in fact a measure of money.

This is a parable of using what you have been given
to create a better future.

It's a parable about investing what you have been given
to ensure that you can do even more to serve.

It's a parable about wise stewardship
that extends the influence and impact
of our physical resources.

The servant who hides and hoards his resources is condemned.
The servants who use their resources for growth
are praised and entrusted with more.

I hope in the weeks ahead
I will learn more of the wonderful resources
you have been given here at BTPC
to serve Christ through the growth of this congregation.

I know a bit, but not enough.
We will get to know each other much better
as we work together to design and implement a viable partnership
that will ensure a flourishing future for both congregations.

We will get to know each other much better
as we work together,
worship together,
pray together, and
witness together.

Let me tell you a little bit about what I have come to know
about the gifts that the people of Brentwood
bring into this relationship.

These are the talents they bring to the table.

They bring a legacy of savings and facilities
that will enable us to attempt and assess
a variety of strategies
for growing as a congregation of Jesus Christ's beloved friends.

They bring a tenacious spirit
that has withstood some testing times
and live that spirit with grace and hospitality.

They bring a willingness to try new things,
to enter into new relationships,
to find pioneering ways to build up their church
in mission and ministries.

They bring a sharp business sense
of how to protect their interests and care for their resources
so they can serve in the ways to which Christ is calling them.

George Leslie MacKay went to Formosa in 1871,
almost 140 years ago.
As he left Toronto,
he remarked that he was “like Abraham, not knowing whither he went.”
The enterprising spirit, the pioneering spirit,
with which he started and sustained his ministry
was exemplary.
I hope we can find that same enterprising and pioneering spirit
here at Brentwood and Burnaby Taiwanese
as we explore new ways to serve Christ together,
new ways to combine our talents,
financial and human,
to build a strong Presbyterian presence
in this new mission field.

May we all be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit
as we discover what Jesus Christ is calling us to do together.

Amen

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