

Anticipating the Reign of Christ – Advent 2010

Isaiah 2:1-5 & Genesis 12:1-9

(Hymns – 172, 110, 206, 743)

November 28, 2010

What Jesus Christ Does

In the midst of the dark and the damp and the cold,
at least in the northern hemispheres,
Christians around the world, for centuries,
have anticipated the coming of the light.

That light is Jesus Christ,
the unique human/divine being
in whom God did something outrageously gracious and merciful.

He reconciled the world to himself.
He chose to deal with all of the fear and faithlessness
of all his years of disappointing dealings with human beings
by making a fresh start in Jesus Christ.

In a way that had not happened before,
and for which there has been no need of since,
God reconciled himself to the human species.
He put his anger and disappointment aside
and created a new way into flourishing human living –
a relationship with himself in Jesus Christ
through the inner workings of their Holy Spirit.

That is what we celebrate at Christmas –
the coming of God to save the human race
and everything in creation that supports our flourishing.

So, as we anticipate with Christians around the world
the celebration in which we remember yet again
the unique event of God taking flesh to redeem us,
I want to take some time over the next few Sundays
to look at what this coming means for us here at Brentwood
as we seek to restore the viability of this congregation.

I think over this past year we have spent together
we have learned one primary lesson –
unless we pay attention to the guidance of the Holy Trinity
our efforts to revive our mission and ministries are fruitless.

We will nourish souls to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ
when our worship, learning, fellowship, and service
are all focused on and aligned with
a deep desire to live every dimension of our lives as a friend of Jesus Christ.

So, as we begin our second year together in Christ's service,
I want to look with you at some things I consider essential
to the future faithfulness and fruitfulness of this congregation.

I want to take a look at what Jesus Christ does in us and through us.
I want to take a look at how we reflect the emerging world church.
And I want to take a look at what's in it for us,
how we benefit from what Jesus Christ does for the world.

This morning, our focus is on what Jesus Christ does.
And I've taken us back to the early days of the Old Testament story,
to the account in Gen 12 of the covenant with Abraham and Sarah.

I think this is the pivotal covenant in the whole of the Scriptures.
It clarifies the covenant God made with Adam and Eve,
the one they broke out of fear and arrogance.
And it is the covenant that all the others in the Scriptures
seek to restore.
It is, in one way or another,
at the heart of every Psalm we have studied this year.

Here's how the Tanakh translation renders the words of the covenant:

*I will make of you a great nation,
And I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
And you shall be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you
And curse him that curses you;
And all the families of the earth
Shall bless themselves by you.*

Abraham is blessed in order to be a blessing to all the families of the earth.
He is blessed with land and offspring and the promise of God's presence.

In many ways, it's a reversal of the curse on Adam and Eve –
exile, painful child birth, and barren land.

This blessing is a free gift of God's grace.

From the Biblical account, Abraham has done nothing to deserve this.

It is God's choice to make this man the father of those
who will bless all the families of the earth
by their faithful flourishing in relationship with this God who created the world.

It's the relationship with God that is crucial here.
The land and the children are means of offering the blessing
that is centred in the relationship initiated by God in this covenant.

“I will be your God,” says the Lord,
“and you will be my friends,
ambassadors of my reign in all the earth
among all peoples.”

This is the heart of the covenant that is restored in Jesus Christ,
the One is *the* faithful friend of the God of Abraham.
And because of Christ's faithfulness,
we are considered faithful.
We are freed from the fear of failure
and freed for the flourishing of faith.

In that freedom, we become again a blessing to all the families of the earth.
That is our purpose.
Not to be a little group of Christians huddled up against each other in fear,
but a people of God courageously reaching out in blessing
to the many needs and aspirations of our neighbours.
Our blessing comes as we bless others.

This is what Jesus Christ does.
He blesses people.
And as his faithful friends, living *in* him,
we do the same.
Blessing this neighbourhood is our mission at Brentwood.
We offer opportunities for people
to get connected and centred with Jesus Christ in worship,
to learn of the benefits of a Christian way of living,
to enjoy the warmth and support of Christian fellowship,
and to be part of something bigger than themselves
by serving Christ's mission in the world.
All of these activities are ways of being blessed in Christ
in order to be a blessing to all the families of the earth.

As we anticipate the reign of Christ in 2010,
let us search afresh for additional ways of being the blessing
God has blessed us to be
in what Jesus Christ does.