

**Memorize & Ponder**

**Brentwood Presbyterian Church  
August 18, 2013**

**Witnesses to the Promise**

**Luke 24:45-49 & Ps 82  
(115, 759, 726, 727)**

We are surrounded by people making promises.

Most advertising, in essence,  
is a promise to provide what we think we need,  
or at least what the advertisers' clients think we should need.  
It can be as simple as washing detergent, or deodorant, or cars.  
It can be as complex as dating services, or schools, and or even churches.  
But every advertisement contains a promise.  
It is a witness that is carefully crafted to shape your decisions.

What most advertising promises  
is some satisfaction of your needs.  
To the need for affection,  
various products and services promise to make you more attractive.  
To the need for security,  
various products and services promise to make you safer.  
To the need for power,  
various products and services promise to make you more effective and influential.

Advertisers seek to appeal to the whole person –  
to emotions, to instinct, to intellect –  
in ways that shape the person's decision regarding the product or service.  
The bulk of advertising dollars these days  
is still spent on media that mix images, words, and music  
carefully crafted to touch every dimension of our human senses  
with a pleasing promise of flourishing life  
through the consumption or use of that particular product or service.

This is the air we breathe every day,  
this is the water we swim in,  
this is the world that surrounds us –  
highly skilled and highly paid witnesses  
to the promised benefits of their products and services.

Advertising is often seen as deceptive and manipulative,  
done by cynical people witnessing to false promises  
that pressure people into irrational decisions.  
And there is, admittedly, a lot of that.

But have you noticed the words we've been using  
to describe this practice of advertising –  
'witness' and 'promise.'

Those are words that are commonly used in another context,  
a context that should not be associated with cynical manipulation.

That context is the church.

That context is the community of followers of Jesus, the Christ,  
that is gathered here this morning at Brentwood,  
and in similar gatherings for worship around the world.

We gather in worship to be shaped as witnesses  
to the promise that the God of Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets  
made to the world that God created and is creating.

That promise is one of community.

That promise is one of security in the company of that God.

That promise is one of affection from that God.

That promise is one of the power to witness to the love of that God.

As the beloved children and friends of that God,  
we are given the security, affection, and power to witness  
to what that God is doing in this world.

That's where our text for memorizing and pondering this week comes in.

It helps us understand who the energizing source of all life is,  
what this energy we have come to know as YHWH is doing in the world  
and how this God is doing it.

First and foremost, YHWH is doing his good for the world through Jesus, the Christ.

This passages comes at the end of Luke's Gospel,  
and sets up the next chapter in Luke's writing, The Acts of the Apostles.

Luke has crafted a witness that claims Jesus is the fulfillment  
of all YHWH's promises to the world made through the Jewish people.

God keeps all of these promises through the person of Jesus,  
the Christ in whom God took flesh and dwelt among us.

It may seem like a strange thing for a God to do,  
but that's just the way the freedom and creativity of this God works.  
In Jesus, the Christ, all the promises for human flourishing are fulfilled –  
loving community, safe existence, and beneficial capability –  
enjoying affection, being secure, and doing good.

That's what the God who came in Jesus, the Christ, does for us –  
fulfills all those promises so we can be blessings in the world.

What the risen Jesus,  
through whom these promises were finally fulfilled,  
was doing as he opened the disciples' minds to the Scriptures,  
was reminding them of the promises.

And Jesus, through the work of the Holy Spirit,  
continues to do that for us and our generation.

He is a work reminding us of the promises of God  
as we memorize and ponder these texts each week.

This is not just rote memory work.

This is an opportunity to entering into a conversation with Jesus, the Christ,  
about what he has done for us and invites us to do out of gratitude.

In this passage, Jesus' final commission to his first disciples,  
he invites them, and us,  
to proclaim repentance and the forgiveness of sins to all nations.

The message promises freedom from the failures of our past.  
They no longer define us in God's eyes.

Rather, God's love does.

We are God's beloved people clothed in the power of the Holy Spirit  
to go into the world and witness to God's vision of well-being.

The great community of witnesses  
who wrote the various sections of our Christian Scriptures  
most frequently called this vision of well-being *Shalom*.

It is the gift of YHWH,  
the sum of all the blessings he bestows on his human creatures  
so they can be all those blessings wherever they go  
and with whomever they find themselves.

They, and we, as the direct inheritors of their commission,  
are empowered to witness to the benefits of  
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity,  
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

This is our most important calling in this world,  
the most important thing we can do with the life  
God gave to us and sustains in us.

God is continually redeeming this life for us,  
helping us to see afresh the new possibilities he is creating  
so we can witness continually to the well-being  
that flows from being in communion with Jesus, the Christ.

This is what we advertise  
every time we invite someone to come and see  
what's going on at Brentwood Presbyterian Church;

every time we invite someone to enjoy with us  
how Jesus is opening our minds to the riches of the Christian Scriptures;  
every time we invite someone to be moved with us  
by the wonderful music that we experience week after week;  
every time we bow in prayer with each other  
to seek God's blessing on everything we do.

We witness to the promise of YHWH in Jesus Christ,  
fulfilled through the workings of the Holy Spirit,  
every time we let someone know about the source of our flourishing.

That source, of course, is our relationship with Jesus, the Christ.

In the constant din of modern advertising –  
(have you ever noticed that the commercials are louder on the TV  
than the programs?) –  
your invitations to come and see may seem like a still, small voice.

And they probably are.

But that is how the Holy Spirit works –  
through gentle, sincere, respectful invitations  
that witness to what empowers you to flourish as a blessing in this world.

Will you extend such an invitation this week?

*May the Spirit take these ponderings  
and provoke in all of us  
a witness of love and good deeds.*

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