

Being the Church at Brentwood

You Are Witnesses - May 20, 2012

**Ps 43 & Luke 24:44-53
(Hymns – 764, 678, 363, Medley)**

I want to focus this morning
on the final words spoken by Jesus to his disciples
before his Ascension.

The event of the Ascension that the world-wide church celebrates this Sunday,
the taking up of Jesus Christ into heaven,
is one of those miraculous accounts
that makes no sense to our modern rational minds.
I, for one, am not going to speculate on what might or might not
be possible for the God who created all that is,
has revealed, most clearly in Jesus Christ, his love for the whole creation,
and who continues to work for its well-being through the Holy Spirit.
I'm at an age where I'm willing to let God be God
and I choose to focus my energy on figuring how best to be a blessing
as a beloved mature child and friend of that God.

The church universal has traditionally seen three benefits
flowing from the Ascension:
first, Jesus is an advocate for us with God;
second, he takes our humanity with him and blesses it with his full grace; and
third, he sends his Spirit to sustain and enhance his presence with us on earth.

So, I want to focus on the message Jesus left with his disciples
rather than what actually happened.

If we are to be faithful witnesses
to the way God fulfilled the promises of the Old Testament,
the promises made to those God originally chose
to partner with him in blessing creation,
then we are best served by listening as carefully as we can
to what Jesus says while with us in person
and figure out what that means for discipleship,
for being the church,
in our neighbourhood.

It means, first and foremost, the forgiveness of sins for all nations.
What separates us from the love and companionship of the Source of our being
is overcome and erased.

Our fear-fueled desires to control and dominate,
the attitudes of superiority and arrogance that divide the world into them and us,
are challenged by the presence and practice of compassion
in the person of Jesus Christ,
Emmanuel (God with us) in the flesh.

This Messiah,
the One promised by God to help the world see itself aright and act accordingly,
is the compassionate ruler anointed by God
to bring justice, righteousness, and delight on earth.
In the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures,
Mashiha (Messiah) is translated as *Kristos* (Christ).
That's the connection that Christians make.
This Jesus of Nazareth is God's promised compassionate ruler,
the One who suffers with and for his people
in order to restore them to their full dignity and destiny.

Human beings are reconciled to the God who created and sustains them.
They are not cut off by judgment and rejection.
They are welcomed and accepted as beloved friends.
They are respected as co-creators of a peaceable commonwealth with God.
They are redeemed and restored to their original dignity and worth,
walking with God and exploring together what joys might be possible.

What has been done by human beings in the past
that harmed, maimed, and killed those created and beloved by God
is no longer held against us by God.
In some mysterious but effective way,
Jesus has paid the price to restore us to God's favour.
What he advocates for is God's continuing forgiveness
so we are freed from guilt and shame
to use our energies for good,
to use all our gifts and abilities to bless this creation.

This Sunday, we remember the recent work our churches
have done with First Nations to walk with them
as they heal from the abuses inflicted on them
by the policies of repression and the practices of abuse
that have marked much of our history together.
A particularly poignant instance of this was our residential schools.

This process of reconciliation and healing
involves an honest and open acknowledgement
of the abuse and harm done,
but it also involves the courage to move beyond that
into a healed and reconciled future

with the compassionate support and guidance of Jesus Christ.

Our own Presbytery helped to found and continues to support one of the denomination's efforts to reconcile and heal – Hummingbird Ministries under the leadership of the Rev. Mary Fontaine.

There's an insert in your bulletin with more information.

I encourage you to read it carefully.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada, as it seeks to faithfully witness to and follow Jesus Christ, took a powerful first step in that direction with its 1994 Confession to Aboriginal Peoples. Part of the Prayer for Ourselves and Others this morning will be taken from a prayer offered by Rick Fee when we celebrate the 10th anniversary of this confession and reflects the core convictions of that confession. Listen carefully as we pray together a little later in the service.

Here's another example of the way we here at Brentwood point to and practice the presence and power of Jesus Christ in our neighbourhood and around the world.

This week session decided to make a small donation to support the higher education of Everlyne Anyango Anyangu, a young Kenyan mother of 3, who wants to go to Masinde Muliro University to get her Bachelor of Business Management degree with the Human Resources option.

A friend, who was secretary down at Central Presbyterian Church, phoned to say that a friend of hers was seeking support for this young woman and would I be willing to talk with her.

I said yes, heard from Shelagh Armour-Godbolt, who is with us this morning, got the information, took it to session, and we considered and made the decision to contribute.

It's another simple but concrete way we witness to the compassion of God we experience in Jesus Christ.

These are just two examples of the impact that being reconciled to God in Jesus Christ, that being healed of our fear-driven need to dominate and control, has on those who choose to following Jesus Christ and witness to his love.

We live other examples every day.

May God continue to strengthen and guide us in that witness.

A Prayer for Healing and Reconciliation

Creator God, your church is established not in human power, not in arrogance, domination, subjugation; not in laws nor in force. Your church is established in each human heart when that human being turns their eyes to see you looking at them. Your church is established in the contrition of each soul. Your church is made powerful and mighty, your church is strongest, when those same convicted people reach out in their shared brokenness to be your body reaching out to others.

We seek to walk more nearly with you. As we walk, journeying together, we seek to celebrate respect, trust, honour, and true sharing. We pray that we will be used as a church to convey your Gospel in word and in action. May we seek to affirm and encourage so that all may stand tall, walk proudly, and realize their full potential for flourishing life. Lord God, you speak to each individual soul. Only when each of us has been made whole, when each has been made strong, when each has been redeemed, can we then be part of your body that will seek to do good and will reflect no ill.

In seeing Jesus within each brother and sister, we ask your help and guidance for the future. May we be truly faithful and be drawn together as one body. We commit ourselves to all that will enable, to all that will give life, to all that will sustain and build up.

Almighty God, this is our prayer to you through him who is our Advocate, who forgave us and calls us to forgive.

Amen