

Getting to Know Jesus, the Christ

Oct 12, 2014 – Thanksgiving Sunday

Where did *that* come from?

Ps 100 & Deut 8:17-18

(803, 802, 807, 648)

I love the wisdom that emerges from the conversations
that we have at Bible study every second Friday
here at the church.

It's just another one of the spaces we create
for Jesus, the Christ, to encounter us
with the riches of grace that the Holy Trinity offers us
so we can bless the world.

The means of encounter that we focus on most frequently here at Brentwood
is a text from God's written word in Scripture
as it witnesses to our relationship with the Living Word, Jesus Christ.
That text, and the transforming opportunity it offers to us,
is present in the bulletin insert each week,
is posted on our website each week,
is reflected upon at Jazz Evensong each week,
is explored in our Bible studies every second week,
and shapes the whole experience of Sunday Morning Worship every week.

I think it's important to remember the several ways in which we
offer these opportunities for Christ to reveal and deepen
his redeeming relationship with us.
It's what the church is really all about –
offering space for Christ to reveal and redeem.

But back to our Bible study this past Friday.

The question I posed was
"What are you most thankful for this Thanksgiving?"

The answer offered, agreed to by all, was
"Everything!"

It's so simple – and so true.

My favourite Old Testament teacher is Walter Brueggemann.
His commentary on Deuteronomy claims this is a key book
for understanding the way the Old Testament
shapes the formation of the way Christians see the world.
It focuses on the covenant between God and Israel,
God's assurance of well-being (*SHALOM*)
in return for Israel's trust and obedience.
This is the 'Way' to live a flourishing life –
recognize the grace of the source of all creation
and live in loving relationship with that source.
Deuteronomy summarizes generations of insight and wisdom
in how to live with and for this loving, supreme God,
this compassionate energy that forms and fills the universe.

Our text is one of those gems of insight and wisdom.

*Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand
has gotten me this wealth."
But remember the Lord your God,
for it is he who gives you the power to get wealth,
so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors,
as he is doing today.*

These two verses bring together three aspects of our faith
that are worth recalling and emphasizing this Thanksgiving Sunday.

First, as we remembered at our Bible study on Friday,
everything comes from God.

The riches we enjoy, whatever they may be –
material goods, meaningful work, good health,
promising education, loving relationships –
all come from God.

We receive them, give thanks for them, and use them for good.
Even when goods are scarce, work is draining, health is compromised,
education is challenging, and relationships are dysfunctional,
we can see these situations as an opportunity, an invitation,
to see things differently and,
relying on God's grace and goodness,
to transform our attitudes and behaviours
to improve everything associated with the situation.

It's really all a matter of how we see things,
whether can we see God present and at work in the situation
and trust him to help us work through it as Jesus Christ would.

That's what having in us the mind of Christ means.

Second, we are reminded of the nature of that God.

This is not a God who conforms easily
to the kind of god we think we need in any given moment.
When we have in us the mind of Christ,
life is not about our needs, whatever we think they may be.

Life is about the covenant
that God swore to humanity in Abraham and Sarah.
At Thanksgiving especially, we remember and renew that covenant.
God promises to assure our well-being (in God's terms, not ours)
and, in gratitude, we promise to be loyal and obey.
That obedience, as Jesus summarized it, involves
loving God, loving others, and loving ourselves.
In this covenant, we find the power
to get the wealth that really matters.

Third, the text points not only to the past,
but also to the present and future.

It assures us that God continues to be true to this covenant today.
God promises to be with us so we can bless the world.
It's in this relationship with this God that we flourish.
If that reality lies at the heart of our thanksgiving,
everything else can be seen in its proper perspective.
Everything comes from God.
It doesn't always come the way we expect or the way we want,
but we can grow into our faith
by working through the challenges
assured that God is with us and for us
in Jesus Christ made ever-present by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, the simple answer we discovered afresh last Friday
lies at the heart of my thanksgiving this weekend.

I'm thankful for everything that comes my way.
Where did everything come from?
It came from God.

I see everything as a gift from God, no matter how challenging it may seem.
Everything is an invitation to trust and obey
Everything can draw us closer to our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.
In relationship with this God,
everything the divine energy has in mind for us is possible.

That's truly worthy of praise and thanksgiving.