

Being the Church in Jesus Christ: The Wisdom of Pastor Paul

Brentwood Sermons for 2015

Respect in the Midst of Abuse

**Feb 1, 2015
(The Lord's Supper)**

**Ps 147:1-11 & 1 Thess 1:1-10 – Text = 1 Thess 1:4-5
(563, 548, 530, 556)**

Imagine that dear friends are coming to dinner tonight,
perhaps coming earlier this afternoon
to watch the Super Bowl with you,
then stay on for dinner.

These are friends who you respect deeply,
both for who they are and who they can become.

Your times together are mutually nourishing.
Your mutual respect grows as you enjoy each other's company.

What kind of preparations would you make for their visit?

What attitudes and behaviours would create the space
for the kind of hospitality you want your dear friends to enjoy?

From the invitation through the preparations,
you'd probably feel affection, hope, and delight,
perhaps all infused with a bit of nervousness
in the desire to get everything just right.

You'd clean up the apartment or house.

You'd arrange the furniture just right
to encourage the conversations.

You'd set the table with their favourite dishes,
perhaps using a gift or two that they had given you.

You'd fill the space with delectable smells
as you lovingly prepared their favourite foods.

The consequence of all this forethought and preparation
would be an evening of companionship,
nourishment, and joy.

I wanted to put that imagine in your mind,
to fill your hearts with those feelings,

to spark your instincts with those memories
of giving or receiving that quality of hospitality,
as we gathered for our monthly celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Granted, there are important differences with this dinner.

This morning, around this table, Jesus is the host.
This is a ritual supper,
with very small portions of food
and very large portions of respect
for who we are and who we can become.
Through the redeeming and sustaining power of the Holy Spirit,
and in the service of our creator God,
Jesus shows respect for us by inviting us to this table.
It is open to all who love the Lord.
Here, we gather together, called by Jesus Christ,
to enjoy his respect, hospitality, and nourishment,
to be known as his dear friends.
We experience our friendship with Jesus afresh,
in ways that transform ever more deeply
our instincts, emotions, and intellects,
that transform the ways in which we are friends of Jesus Christ
in and for the world.

This the kind of respect that we find Paul expressing
in the introductions of each of his letters.
They are greetings to his readers.
They are expressions of gratitude for their friendship,
reminders of the kind of mutual respect they have for each other
as they live together in Christ –
one body, one family, one community.
None of the many social divisions they experience –
wealth, race, tribe, tongue, or status –
apply in this gathering around this table.
All are equally respected and welcomed as beloved children of God,
brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

It is instructive to remember the context
into which these respectful letters were written.
Abuse was common in these cities.
The wealthy abused the poor.
Men abused women.
Masters abused slaves.
Races and tribes abused other races and tribes.

This was a world in which human life was cheap,
to be used and abused
in the search of power, privilege, and prosperity.

There are three features of these greetings,
found here in the first 10 verses of the Thessalonian letters,
that are worth noting and pondering,
especially when considered in the context of such abuse.

First, there is a deep affection in the respect
that underlies the writing of these letters
that comes from the Creator who saved the world in Jesus
and is completing that work through the Holy Spirit.
No matter what may be happening to you in the world around,
here, in this family of the friends of Jesus,
you are respected and loved.

Second, this unique respect and love, from this unique source,
is a gift from the God who created all that is.
Because of its source and its power,
it cannot be taken away or diminished
by the attitudes and behaviours of human beings,
including yourselves.
It is yours for keeps, forever, fully intact as it was given.

And third, this gift from God,
this respect that cannot be diminished or damaged,
is given so you can flourish,
so you can live into the full potential that God desires for you
in every dimension of your lives.
That's why God blesses you with respect,
so you can bless others with the same thing.
That's the strength and mission you have in the midst of abuse.
Contributing all you are and have to that mission
is what it means to flourish in the Christian faith.

Paul's greetings to his readers in his letters
capture the depth and breadth of God's respectful hospitality.
It's the warmth of welcome we feel here at Brentwood
Sunday after Sunday,
Wednesday after Wednesday.
We are blessed every week by Jesus' hospitality
working within us and among us by the power of the Holy Spirit
to achieve what our creator God intends for this world.

Think again of the way
that you would welcome your dearest friends to your home for dinner.
Multiply that 70 X 7.

That's the kind of respect that you get from Jesus Christ.

That's the kind of welcome you get at his table this morning.

That's the kind of nourishment to flourish that you receive this morning
and every morning or evening that you accept
Jesus' invitation to dine together.

Come, all is ready.
Let's enjoy the Lord's Supper together.

*Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far
more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus
to all generations, forever and ever. Amen (Eph 3:20-21)*