

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

Brentwood Sermons for 2015

A Profile of Pastor Paul 2 – Proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah

Jan 11, 2015

**Ps 29 & Acts 17:1-9 – Text = Acts 17:2-4
(528, 727, 672, 590)**

Just what did happen with Saul/Paul on that Damascus road?
What brought about the dramatic transformation
Luke described in our passage last week?
What led to the kind of activities we read about
in our passage this morning?

It is hard to be sure.
We have Luke's account that we read last week
and a few references in Paul's own letters.
It was clearly an encounter with the risen Jesus.
We can see its impact throughout Paul's letters.

This encounter with the risen Christ
made Paul appreciate that this Jesus,
whom he had been denigrating and whose followers he was arresting,
was, in fact, the Messiah in whom God's promises to the world through Israel
had been finally fulfilled.

Not 'was going to be' at some vague time in the future,
but 'was' now, through his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.

This encounter with the risen Christ
made Paul appreciate what Jesus had done
and accept the call to participate in the working out of this salvation.
Through this appreciation and acceptance,
he became an enthusiastic herald of this Gospel to the Gentiles,
announcing at every opportunity that the Reign of God had truly begun,
bringing with it a commonwealth of hospitality, justice, and peace.

This encounter with the risen Christ
made Paul align himself with Jesus
and his way of seeing the world and its future.
That alignment with Jesus' way of seeing the world
involved a radical critique of Israel's faith and life from within that tradition,
calling that tradition back to its roots in God's creation of the world

and in the covenant with Abraham and Sarah,
the covenant that promised God's help
as they blessed all of creation.
Jesus and Paul saw themselves in continuity with
the prophetic critique of the ways Judaism was being practiced in their time,
drawing especially on the writings of Isaiah.

This encounter with the risen Christ
made Paul an advocate for the kingdom of God,
a resilient, clear and passionate reforming voice
in the lives nourished by the Christian communities that he led and advised
so they could be better reforming voices in the world.

That's the flow of the faith that the Holy Spirit shaped in Paul
as a result of the impact of his encounter with the risen Christ.
Paul was transformed from persecutor to proponent,
from adversary to advocate.

What God did with that transformation,
with the impact of Paul's encounter with God in the risen Christ,
will be the focus of our Biblical studies this year at Brentwood.
We'll explore what kind of mission God shaped through Paul,
what kind of communities gathered around that mission,
what kind of opportunities and challenges those communities faced
and what kind of advice and guidance Paul offered to them,
and we'll see how Paul worked in them and among them.

We see some of that in this morning's text from Acts.
It introduces us to Paul's customary way of working.
He arrived in a city.
He went to the synagogue, or Jewish place of worship.
In some cases, he might have been invited.
In many cases, he wasn't.
Then he argued with the interpreters of the Scriptures,
the rabbis, the teachers.
"You think this passage means this," he might have said,
"but I tell you this is really related to the suffering, death, and resurrection
of Jesus, God's chosen Messiah, in whom the Kingdom of God has come.
You are all invited to participate in it, along with all peoples."

The Messiah, in Biblical terms, is the King anointed by God
to rule the world with justice and equity
so they may enjoy unconditional hospitality and deep peace.
The Apostles, including Paul, proclaimed to the world
that this anointed One of the true God was Jesus of Nazareth.

For Paul, the prophetic writings that spoke most clearly
about Jesus being the Messiah,
that helped him most to make sense of his encounter with the risen Christ,
were in the Suffering Servant passages in Isaiah.
Here is the essence of that prophetic tradition
As we find it in Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12.

¹³ *See, my servant shall prosper;
he shall be exalted and lifted up,
and shall be very high.*

¹⁴ *Just as there were many who were astonished at him
—so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance,
and his form beyond that of mortals—*

¹⁵ *so he shall startle many nations;
kings shall shut their mouths because of him;
for that which had not been told them they shall see,
and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.*

*Who has believed what we have heard?
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?*

² *For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.*

³ *He was despised and rejected by others;
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;
and as one from whom others hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him of no account.*

⁴ *Surely he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.*

⁵ *But he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed.*

⁶ *All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have all turned to our own way,
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.*

⁷ *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.*

⁸ *By a perversion of justice he was taken away.
Who could have imagined his future?
For he was cut off from the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people.*

⁹ *They made his grave with the wicked
and his tomb with the rich
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.*

¹⁰ *Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain.
When you make his life an offering for sin,
he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days;
through him the will of the LORD shall prosper.*

¹¹ *Out of his anguish he shall see light;
he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.
The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.*

¹² *Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;
because he poured out himself to death,
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.*

The sin and iniquities referred to in this passage from Isaiah were the attitudes and behaviours that ran counter to the covenant, counter to God's promise to Abraham and Sarah to be their God so they could bless the world with hospitality, justice, and peace.

Jesus suffered rejection, injustice, and violence to bring forgiveness of the past and to open up prosperity for the future, prosperity that can only be built on hospitality, justice, and peace.

But what led to and sustained Paul's boldness and courage to advocating for Jesus as God's chosen Messiah, the one in whom all of world's hopes were realized and all the world's fears were dispelled? And to do this in the hostile social, political, and religious environments that we explored last week.

It was the importance of the relationship the risen Christ had established with Paul, the potential for human flourishing in that relationship and its message, and the power of the Holy Spirit to make the message resonate with all peoples.