

Getting to Know Jesus, the Christ

June 29, 2014

Reflections on the Great Great Commission

Ps 45:10-17 and Matthew 28:18-20
(786, 773, 530, 556)

I concluded the sermon last week
with an invitation to ponder the gifts God has given you
to contribute to the work and witness of Brentwood Presbyterian,
this small, but determined, community of disciples
sent to North Burnaby to be the friends of Jesus Christ
in this time and this place.

You'll remember that this text,
known in the Christian tradition as the Great Commission,
Jesus comes to his discouraged and uncertain disciples
and assures them of his everlasting presence and unequalled power.
On the basis of that promise,
he encourages them to witness and teach,
to baptize and follow.

This year, the General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada
directed all its agencies to inspire, equip, and renew
its congregations and missions
to obey the Great Commandment
(love God, neighbour and self)
and to follow the Great Commission
(go out and make disciples, baptize, and obey).

If every congregation in our denomination did that,
I'm convinced that we would experience and contribute to
an inspiring revival of the gifts we have to renew the church.
So, let's take a closer look at what Brentwood is doing
to use this vision to build a more faithful future for *this* congregation.

First, and I think this is so important,
we give those concerned with the well-being of Brentwood
a say in its future.

This is how Presbyterians believe God works with and through his people.
Jesus Christ gives his gift of wisdom to the whole congregation,
not simply to a few leaders in the congregation.
The congregation chooses its leaders,
in calling a minister/teaching elder and electing the ruling elders.
At Brentwood, we keep talking with each other,
every Sunday as we gather and in special congregational consultations,
believing that God will work in those conversations
to provide clarity and build ownership
for the mission he has in mind for us
as we draw on his energy to serve his glory.

As Session meets on a monthly basis for most of the year,
we bring what we have heard Jesus Christ saying
through the voices of his people
and explore what might be possible here at Brentwood.
You have told us what you value most about church –
worship, learning, fellowship, and service.
Those values form the agenda for our Session meetings.
After we talk about how we can best offer
these four nourishing activities in the service of the grace of Jesus Christ,
we review our use of our facilities and finances
to make all of our mission work possible.

We co-create this congregation with Jesus Christ,
the church's primary leader,
one conversation after another.
So, keeping the conversations going
about how best to inspire, equip, and renew this congregation
in service of the Great Commission,
is crucial to our well-being.

Know that your voice is always welcome.
Make sure the Session knows what you think.
It might be in a quiet word with Pam, Emmanuel, Winston, Dorothy, or me.
It might be a note or e-mail to any of us.
It might be over lunch after church on Sunday.
It might be during a congregational consultation or meeting.
wherever and however you are comfortable expressing your views
about the inspiring, equipping, and renewing of this congregation,
we will be listening, considering, and deciding,
all for the glory of the triune God.

One of the key foci for our conversations over the next couple of years
will be the renewing of our space, both inside and outside,
for the long-term viability of the congregation.

We are proceeding with our idea of repurposing the sanctuary
to serve as a community arts venue here in North Burnaby.

Several arts administrators from the City of Burnaby
visited us a couple of weeks ago
and affirmed that the space would work well for arts events
and offered their support and advice as we moved forward
with more renovations.

They were especially impressed with the chairs we had chosen.

Next Sunday, we will officially launch our chair campaign
to raise the funds to pay for the 102 chairs we have ordered this week.
We already have over \$8,000 paid or pledge of our \$14,280 goal.

Some in Presbytery have raised an interesting question about our plans.

As I hear them, they wonder about putting these resources
into space and facilities rather than into staff and programs.

It's a challenging question,
one that we have asked ourselves already
and will continue to ask as we move through the conversations and decisions
that lay ahead.

What has occurred to me in pondering this question
is that there is an 'evangelism of space' at work here.

By opening this space to the community
for activities that don't necessarily have anything to do with church,
we are giving the Holy Spirit an opportunity to work with the people who come.

The Christian symbols in this space will, for the most part, remain.

The Bibles and hymns books will be in the racks under the chairs.

Other Christian literature will be around.

People will know this is a Christian space
where people are nourished every week to flourish
In the grace of Jesus Christ.

That will serve the Great Commission, we are convinced,
In a very effective way.

This is a small, but determined, congregation
with interesting possibilities emerging
one conversation after another.

Thank you for being part of those conversations
and I look forward to where the Spirit will lead us through them
this coming year.