

## Getting to Know Jesus, the Christ

June 29, 2014

### Reflections on the Great Commandment

**Ps 13 and Matthew 28:18-20  
(778, 411, 765, 769)**

“Without a prophetic vision,” writes the sage in Proverbs 29:18, “the people perish, but happy are those who keep God’s law.”

In the Great Commandment, we have Jesus’ summary of God’s law.  
It’s all about love – love God, love others, and love yourself.

In the Great Commission, that we read this morning,  
we have Jesus’ prophetic vision of what his church will become.  
It’s all about practicing love – with God, with others, and with ourselves.

By God’s grace, we are filled with energy of love.  
In Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, that energy flows through us  
to enable us to live the law of love in gratitude for the gift of love.

To reframe the sage’s intent in positive terms,  
“With a prophetic vision, the people flourish,  
and happy are those who live into this reality.”

As I mentioned in my notes to ponder this week,  
the national meeting of our denomination that met in early June this year  
spent a lot of time deliberating and debating  
a suggested vision for The Presbyterian Church in Canada.  
I liked the vision and voted for it.  
Here’s how it was worded:

*Sharing faith, hope, and love in Christ,  
our priority is to equip, renew, and inspire local congregations  
to grow in faith and hope,  
spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ  
to the glory of the triune God.*

When Presbyterians get together in council to decide things,

they talk a lot.  
It's the nature of democracy.  
Everyone has their say,  
though, in the end, they don't always have their way.

The motion to approve this statement was defeated 112-90.  
I had some quibbles with the wording myself.  
I think we needed to add "*and missions*" to "*local congregations*,"  
but I voted in favour of adopting the vision.  
As visions go, and I've worked with a lot of communities and individuals  
to develop visions that can focus and guide their energies,  
it was pretty good – relatively short, clear, and provocative,  
in the sense that it calls forth our best efforts to serve a grand purpose.

Though defeated in its original form, the intent of the vision was not lost.  
The next day, revised wording that made the intent a declaration rather than a vision  
came to the floor of the General Assembly and was approved.

Here's how it read:

*That we declare that a clear and critical priority as a denomination  
is to renew, equip and inspire local congregations and missions  
to fulfil the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20)  
and the Great Commandment (Mark 12:29–31)  
to the glory of the triune God.*

That, along with several additional clauses to put the declaration into practice,  
was passed almost unanimously.

So, we are invited here at Brentwood to take up this prophetic vision  
of renewing, equipping, and inspiring ourselves  
to fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandment  
to the glory of the triune God.

We can do this because God has done it first for us.

God came to us in Jesus Christ.

God made us disciples (learners of divine love) through Christ's witness and work.

God initiated us into Christ's body, the church, to be witnesses in the world.

And God promised us, as he has throughout all history, to be with us in loving power.

That is at the heart of the prophetic vision we are invited to share.

That's the pattern of being renewed, equipped, and inspired  
that we find in the text of the Great Commission –  
God comes to us, God teaches us, God reconciles us into his community,  
and God sends us into the world as friends to witness as blessings.

Let me get a bit picky about wording, since it's such a Presbyterian thing.  
I'd change the order of "renewing, equipping, and inspiring"  
to "inspiring, equipping, and renewing."  
We're inspired first by God's prophetic vision of *Shalom* or well-being.  
We're equipped by the work of the Holy Spirit,  
collectively and individually,  
to become agents of that *Shalom* or blessing.  
As we undertake that mission in the world, we are continually renewed  
by the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit  
as we use our particular gifts to respond to the opportunities  
God makes available to us day by day.

This is what it means to nourish souls to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ.  
That's our own Brentwood version of this vision/declaration.  
We do it through worship, learning, fellowship, and service.  
That's what we invite people to participate in here at Brentwood and in the world.  
That's how we fulfill the Great Commission.

Every time the Session or governing board of this congregation meet,  
we consider the affairs of this congregation  
in relationship to those four ways of nourishing souls to flourish –  
worship, learning, fellowship, and service.  
They are the activities that God has used to inspire, equip, and renew the church  
since it started at that first Pentecost.  
When we do our congregational consultations and assessments,  
we ask ourselves how well we are doing and what we can do better  
in relationship to those four ways of nourishing souls to flourish.  
If you've got any ideas at any time about what we might do better,  
please let a member of the Session know or write to all of us –  
Pam, Dorothy, Winston, Emmanuel, and me.

Visions and declarations are empty clanging  
if we do not use them as a framework  
to guide our responses to God's loving energy,  
what we call the glory of God.

Next week we will continue to reflect on the Great Commission  
and look a bit more carefully at how we are using it as a framework  
for guiding our faithful witness here at Brentwood.  
As you ponder and pray over this text further this week,  
I'd encourage you to listen for possibilities that Jesus, the Christ,  
might be suggesting to us for an even more effective use of our resources  
in the service of his Gospel.