

Big Theological Words 2 - Sanctification

**Ps 34:1-8 and Romans 6:15-23 – Sermon Text = Romans 6:17-18
708, 638, 644, 655**

*But thanks be to God that you,
having once been slaves of sin,
have become obedient from the heart
to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted,
and that you, having been set free from sin,
have become slaves of righteousness.*

This past Tuesday, I had an accident.
John Steel and I were playing golf down at Shuksan,
near our cottages in the States.
I was driving the golf cart,
wheeled around in a hurry to take the clubs over to John's ball,
and hit a hole beside the cart path.
The cart stayed upright,
but I flew out of the cart, hitting my ribs on the steering wheel.
The bruising is healing, but slowly.
I still feel a pang of pain
when I move certain parts of my body certain ways.

What has intrigued me is how far away from the injury
some of those movements are.
I'll move my opposite leg in a certain way, for example,
and feel the pain in my bruised ribs.
It has been a powerful reminder
of just how interconnected our bodies are,
how what happens in one part of our bodies
has an impact on other parts of our bodies.

This bodily reminder of all things being interconnected
was timely and providential this week
as I tried to make renewed sense
of Paul's idea of *sanctification*
in the context of the Gospel he had been called to announce.

It's important to remember that Paul thought of himself as an emissary,
someone called and sent by the God of the Gospel
to proclaim that the Primal Origin of all things
had acted in Jesus Christ, and especially in his Resurrection,
to inaugurate a new age in the relationship between God and his creation.

The proclamation was that humanity had been reconciled to God and made participants in God's commonwealth of justice, peace, and beauty.

In Jesus Christ, God invited and enabled all of humanity to participate, comprehend, and cooperate in bringing to final fruition that transformation of the creation begun in the Resurrection, in the creation of a new form of humanity characterized by alignment with and participation in the work of God in the world.

Much of the language I have used in that last paragraph comes from Karl Barth's revolutionary commentary on Paul's epistle to the Romans.

The first edition was published in 1918, at the end of the First World War.

It was revolutionary because it challenged the prevailing theological liberalism of the German church in which Barth had been raised and educated for ministry. In essence, the challenge sought to refocus the thinking of the church back onto the initiative of God's uniquely powerful love seen only in the living Word of God in Jesus Christ revealed to creation in the Resurrection.

It was a recovery of what Barth thought laid at the heart of Paul's letters. It confronted Barth's theological colleagues with the need for humility in their understanding of the Gospel and what it meant for flourishing. This was especially true for those liberal theologians and preachers who had supported the German cause in the First World War. Barth was convinced that they had shown far too much confidence in human agency as a means of knowing and serving the will of God. For Barth, throughout his career as a theologian until the early 1960s, humans had to constantly allow the Holy Spirit to put them under the judging/saving power of the Word's love as they sought to live in obedience to God's call to bless.

By the end of his career, Barth saw that this early rejection of human capacity was overstated as a necessary corrective to the thinking of his day.

His modified stance still sees human capacity having to be enabled by God, made holy and whole by the work of the Holy Spirit working within us and among us.

This how God sanctifies – literally 'make holy' – human beings, God's beloved children and friends.

It involves all of God's merciful activity for us restoring the wholeness God intends for us.

This mature thinking is summarized in Barth's *Evangelical Theology*, my book of the month for July.

There is a short review on our website.

We are going to use this book to initiate our Chapter by Chapter program. These conversations, looking at the book chapter by chapter week by week, will take place on Wed evenings, prior to Jazz Evensong, from 5:30 – 7:30PM, over a bring-your-own supper.

The schedule for these sessions is on the website under the Learning tab.

I want to draw your attention yet again to the promise that we make to people visiting our website.

These days, that's how many people find a church in their neighbourhood.

Delivering on the promise is crucial if people are going to return after their first visit, whether it be on Sunday morning, or on Wednesday night, or to any event here at the church.

We promise to provide a rich experience in the Christian faith that will support you in being the blessing that God has called you to be in the world.

That experience comes through our practice of the disciplines that have sustained and stimulated Christian communities from New Testament times:

- *Worship – encounters with God in music, prayers, readings, and reflections*
- *Learning – education that explores living abundantly in the grace of Jesus Christ*
- *Fellowship – belonging that energizes delightful living through the Holy Spirit*
- *Service – taking all of these gifts from God into the world in order to be a blessing*

Our various gatherings at the church inspire and equip us to carry God's kindness and generosity out into a world that is longing for the kind of reform and resilience that Jesus Christ preached and practiced.

All of these activities are designed to arrange space where God can encounter people with the grace of Jesus Christ through the influence of the Holy Spirit.

In all these activities, God is sanctify us together, making us whole, and therefore holy, as the human beings he created us to be.

If sin, as Paul frequently suggests, is separation from God, then arranging space in which God's reconciling grace has a strong possibility of happening is a crucial mission in our time and place.

We live in the midst of an urban neighbourhood, populated with a wide variety of people from dramatically different backgrounds.

As the high-rises around Brentwood Town Centre go up, both the density and variety will increase – 10,000 new neighbours in the next decade, by some estimates.

Will they find at Brentwood Presbyterian
a space where they are welcomed to experience God's sanctifying grace?
Will they find at Brentwood Presbyterian
a community that actively seeks to support them in that experience?
Will they find at Brentwood Presbyterian
a range of opportunities to become holy and whole as the blessings
God seeks to spread into every corner of his creation?

If we answer those questions with Paul's wisdom on being the church,
we will be faithful emissaries of the God of the Gospel,
participating in the mission to which Paul was appointed.

Paul encouraged his readers to be faithful
in worship, learning, fellowship, and service.

We are among his readers, almost 2000 years later.

And, like those participants in God's reign who first heard Paul's words,
we are being assured that God has done everything necessary
to enable us to be the blessings we were created to be.

God is making us whole and holy
as we participate in worship, learning, fellowship, and service
here at Brentwood Presbyterian.

The purpose of our holiness is to be blessings
to everyone whose lives we touch in any way.

We do this by arranging for them a space in which their holiness and wholeness
can grow to enable them to participate, comprehend, and cooperate
in God's mission of bringing his justice, peace, and beauty
to full flourishing.

This is a space for sanctification.

God's grace makes it so.

May we participate in that mission
by working together as emissaries of the God of the Gospel
and inviting others to do the same.