

Called and Equipped to Flourish

Ps 26 & Philippians 3:12-21
563, 548, 530, 556

***Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own;
but this one thing I do:
forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize
of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 3:13-14)***

Did you have parents who used to call you in for dinner?
I did.

We lived in Niagara Falls, in the north end.
On quiet summer nights, you could actually hear the falls.
It was a great neighbourhood.
About half the houses had kids around my age.
Our local school was half a block away
and we spent a lot of time in that school yard.
We also spent a lot of time on the street,
playing road hockey mostly.

A lot of our neighbourhood play took place
between the time school let out and dinner was ready.
About six o'clock, you began to hear the calls:
Ge-orge!! – usually from his Dad.
Har-ry!! – usually from his Mom.
For me, it was three blasts on the whistle.
We didn't always respond on the first call.
We were having far too much fun.
But eventually, usually in response to a much harsher tone of voice,
or multiple quick blasts on the whistle,
we headed off home to dinner,
then to whatever chores or homework we might have had that day.

I hadn't thought of those childhood rituals for years,
not until I started to think about Paul's wording in this passage
about the "heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus" in vs14.
Literally, the Greek words are "high calling."
In Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of this passage in *The Message*,
he talks about "God beckoning us onward - to Jesus."

We had a lively conversation about the idea of 'heaven'
at Bible study on Friday night this week.
One sense we all had was that heaven was like home.
It was the community that a loving, forgiving parent
welcomed us back into,
like the prodigal experienced in Jesus' parable
that many of us have heard Dan set to jazz so beautifully and powerfully.
The call of God is a call to come home,
to come back into a community that will nourish us to flourish,
to gather around a table that is laden with the gifts of God's grace,
to know that we always have a spiritual home,
with a spiritual family providing healthy, invigorating food.

And we recalled in our conversation
that heaven is already here on earth,
by God's grace in Christ Jesus.
We remembered yet again the words of the Lord's Prayer
- "Your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven" -
and recognized that this commonwealth that is our true home
is present here and now,
especially, though not exclusively, in the church.

It all came down to this simple affirmation of 'street theology'
from this small and diverse group of 'daily theologians' –
God calls us home and nourishes/equips us to flourish
as Christ Jesus' brothers and sisters.

Now, I had a pretty good, comfortable, middle-class home.
It wasn't perfect, but it was supportive and encouraging.
I know that's not the situation for many in this world,
perhaps even some of you in this congregation.
'Home' is not a good memory.
'Home' was not a safe place.
'Home' brings back memories of neglect, rejection, abuse.

But that's where the uniqueness of God's love in Christ Jesus,
and the power of the Holy Spirit to remake 'home; for you
comes into play.

Nothing in this phase of our lives is perfect.
We are still striving to reach that heavenly home, that consoling commonwealth,
that joyful community where all our needs for security, acceptance, and potential
are met in healthy and helpful ways.
We've heard the call, we've had a taste, but there is more to do.
That's what I hear Paul saying in this passage.

Eugene Peterson calls Philippians ‘Paul’s happiest letter.’
He points out how infectious that happiness is in the letter.
I love his composition of words around this fact –
“the dance of words and the exclamations of delight have a way of getting inside us.”
The Greek word ‘rejoice’ appears 16 times in these 4 pages.
But Peterson goes on to talk about how we learn such happiness.

It’s not from a book.
It’s by being an apprentice,
by hanging around those who have been formed
by their profound sense of God’s guidance
in every breath of their being.
We are nourished and equipped in this grace
by absorbing the timing and rhythm of touch of these seasoned disciples.

I used a phrase earlier in this sermon
that Janik introduced to us in our Chapter by Chapter session
on Wednesday night before Jazz Evensong.
The phrase was ‘daily theologians.’
That’s how he sees the teens that he works with
over at Vancouver Taiwanese Presbyterian Church on Sunday afternoons.
That’s how I see all of you, now that he’s given me those words.
All of us are nourished and equipped by God in Christ Jesus
to make heavenly meaning of our lives in this world.
We use different words to express it,
we live it out in different spaces and places during the week,
we have differing levels of confidence in the faith God has given us,
but together we form this commonwealth of daily theologians
who take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the streets
in everything we do in our daily lives.
And for that mission
– in essence, of blessing the world in every way we can –
we are nourished and equipped in this little bit of heaven
called Brentwood Presbyterian Church.

Now, I think I hear our Father calling us to dinner.
Jesus is coming out to bring us home to gather around the family table.
The Holy Spirit is hovering around us to make sure everything is just right.

Let’s enjoy the Lord’s Supper
as the enriched and enriching family formed by God’s call to us
to flourish in the service of the Gospel.