

Sunday Morning Worship at Brentwood – Nov 15, 2015

Living in the Faith that Jesus is Lord

**Ps 16 & Romans 10:5-13 (Text 10:9-10)
671, 675, 680, 687**

***... because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord
and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead,
you will be saved.***

***For one believes with the heart and so is justified,
and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.
(Romans 10:9-10)***

At the opening of the new Vancouver School of Theology building yesterday, Principal Richard Topping added a text from Romans to his remarks in light of the horrific violence in Paris on Friday night.

VST is focused on education for the church
that is 'thoughtful, engaging, and generous.'

Those three words are VST's version of our vision –
'nourishing souls to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ.'
They recognize, as do we, the importance of confessing
with their lips and with their mouths
what Jesus Christ is calling and equipping them to be and do
in their particular time and place.

Richard was moved by the Holy Spirit to remind us
of this mark of authentic Christian life:

***Do not repay anyone evil for evil,
but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.
If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.
(Romans 12:17-18)***

The passage goes on to quote Deuteronomy in the Hebrew Scriptures and remind Paul's readers that judgement and vengeance belongs to God.

Human beings are not entrusted with this task.
Leave it to God who understands better than we do
the complexities of any situation.

Difficult, and frustrating, as this admonition seems to be
in the face of terrorist outrage in Paris,
it is the considered advice of one who has thought deeply
about what it means to live in the faith that Jesus is Lord.

What leads Paul to offer such foolish and scandalous advice?

In a word, it is Paul's Christian faith.

He is sure that he has been incorporated into a new way of being human that began with the resurrection of Jesus as the first being in this new commonwealth governed by God's *SHALOM*, by God's determined desire for justice, peace, and beauty shaping life throughout the whole of his creation.

This kind of transformation changes the way we see the world.
This kind of transformation changes the way we act in the world.
This kind of transformation changes the way we shape the world.

Let's be clear here.

Paul's encounter with the living Christ on the Damascus road disrupted his life in the most dramatic of ways.
In essence, Paul had been a 'terrorist' to the emerging Christian community.
He had official sanction from his religious and political leaders.
But he was out to destroy this seditious new movement.
It's not clear from the records that Paul actually killed Christians, but it is clear that he handed them over to authorities who did.

In the three days following the Damascus road experience,
Paul's sight was redeemed and transformed.

He saw things differently.

He saw Jesus as Lord.

He saw that the God of his ancestors
had raised Jesus from the dead as his Christ
in order to save the world from its addiction to sin and death.

That means that everything changes,
not for Paul alone,
but for the whole of creation.

What Paul experienced was the gift of freedom from sin and death.

It encompassed all of life on this earth and in the next.

That freedom included being liberated from narrow and racist ways
of categorizing any of God's beloved children,
Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female,
Muslim or Christian, refugee or citizen.

All were saved by God in Jesus Christ
and Paul was participating in that salvation
as he planted and built those early churches
around the confession that Jesus is Lord
and the belief that God raised him from the dead.

In this freedom from the God of the Gospel
we make daily decisions about how to live in Christ.
We are no longer bound by fear or division.
We are free to be a new humanity in and with Jesus Christ.
We are free to live authentic Christian lives
that contribute to the justice, peace, and beauty of God's commonwealth.

In the light of that way of seeing things and being in the world, then,
how do we respond to the horrific violence in Paris last week,
and the equally horrific violence in Beirut, in Nigeria,
and in all the other venues of violence
listed in the slide we posted at the beginning of the service?

We pray for the victims and the victimizers.
Human beings live in an energy system
where there are actions and reactions,
all having complex consequences.
Negative reactions can be traced back to perceptions
that a value has been violated or a need not met.
It's an intricate system of injustices
that needs to know that it has been saved and can be changed.
Those of us caught in that system of evil who confess that Jesus is Lord
have the freedom to pray as Jesus taught us in Matthew 5:43-48 –
pray for those who persecute you because everyone is blessed by God.

In complex systems, everyone has an impact.
Everyone, by commission or omission, creates the tone of the system.
So, as we ponder our responses to this week's violence,
God gently but firmly urges us to confess our complicity in it,
to recognize that our attitudes and actions
have probably fed into the cruel consequences that we mourn this morning,
and to repent of that way of being in the world.

In the freedom that comes through repentance,
we then witness to and work for the wellbeing of all peoples.
With Jesus as Lord, our loyalty to that Lord, in our life in that Lord,
has us working for and witnessing to his vision of peace.
It has us following his generous and graceful ways of pursuing it.
We become compassionate and constructive
in the face of cruelty and cynicism.

So, pray, confess and repent, then work and witness.
Sounds pretty simple, doesn't it.

But how many of you are thinking
that this is even more foolish and scandalous than I thought it would be?

Those are thoughts I struggled with
as the Holy Spirit and I worked out this sermon.
And we're still working on it.
What you have this morning is a progress report,
typed in the midst of pain and sorrow.

But the Spirit always has a word of wisdom in such circumstances,
if we can find the calm and curiosity to listen.
This week, for me, it was a gentle reminder to look again
at Reinhold Niebuhr's Serenity Prayer.
Niebuhr taught theology at Union Seminary in New York.
The prayer was written in the 1930s,
when Germany was falling under the heel of Nazi violence
and the Depression was raging around the world.
It was included in a book of prayers for military chaplains
serving in the midst of the horrific violence of the Second World War.

I searched it out again this week
and it spoke powerfully to me yet again
about living in the faith that Jesus is Lord.

I will read it to end the sermon:

*God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.*

*Living one day at a time;
enjoying one moment at a time;
accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
taking, as He did, this sinful world
as it is, not as I would have it;
trusting that He will make all things right
if I surrender to His Will;
so that I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with Him
forever and ever in the next.*

Amen