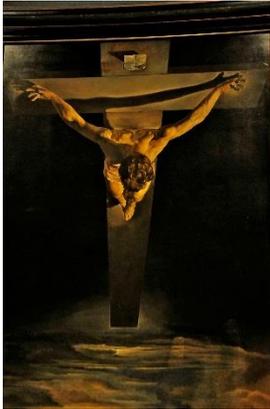


Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, May 6, 2018

Who Gets to Participate? (Psalm 98 & Acts 10:44-48)



**The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.
(Acts 10:45)**

The story line of our passage/ text

The early church is growing – and that means change – and that means some degree of accepting anticipation mixed with anxious resistance – the kind of change and adaptation that works best in most communities is the kind that helps us deliver better our core values – here at Brentwood, as we discovered together 8 years ago and as we keep affirming on a regular basis, those core values are worship, learning, fellowship, and service that nourish souls to flourish in the grace and Jesus Christ – Brad Morrison's *Already Missional* – vital missional congregations have an openness to change in order to preserve core values – I think we have that kind of culture here at Brentwood, thanks to your wisdom and engagement – but our text describes a bit of a shocker for the first Christians, who really saw themselves in the early stages of the movement's growth as reformers of the Jewish religion, calling it back to its core values and announcing that God's universal rule had begun its final stage in Jesus of Nazareth – then God did something to 'astound them' – something that offended many of them and gave them pause to wonder whether they had it right – something that challenged their understanding of justice, kindness, and humility – God included the Gentiles in this new age – gave the Gentiles the gift of the Holy Spirit – created great tension among the various groups who were learning what it meant to follow Jesus as Lord – but the redemptive work done by the crucified Christ is for all of creation

Provocative Points to Ponder

- Gentiles were outsiders – they were the 'them' in the classical human temptation to divide the world into 'them and us' and demonize the 'them' to the point where they become disposable – they are a threat to us – get rid of them – at very least, keep them out – we may try to change them into who we are, but they don't get in until they agree to be 'circumcised' – whatever that may mean to us – certain beliefs, certain behaviours, certain ethnicities, certain levels of wealth, etc – and God comes along and says, in essence, a curse on all your self-serving divisions – all the outsiders are in – no, all of them – in me, "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3:28) – this vision of radical welcome is hard to comprehend, let alone accept, when we live in a culture increasingly built on divisions and distinctions driven by fear – but Galatians emphasizes, and the whole of the

Scriptures attests, that love will cast out fear – our security comes ultimately from participating in God's love - there are few spaces in which a community as diverse as Brentwood Presbyterian gathers so willingly and cares for each other so deeply – and in that care, we are nourished to flourish as we grow into the friends God wants us to be with them (the Holy Trinity), with each other, and with the selves God created us to become

- There's another dimension of the stories from Acts that we have been pondering these past couple of weeks that I think is worth highlighting – the evangelists we have been following are not in control – they keep being surprised (probably shocked and offended) by what God is doing through the Holy Spirit – castrated finance ministers and Gentiles – this is going to disrupt our comfort zones in a serious way – how do we adapt to this new reality? – God seems to be intent on expanding our understanding of who he wants participating in his Commonwealth and who he sees as his chosen people – and it would seem that we are chosen, not for special status in the world, but for blessing the whole of creation
- with this participation comes responsibility – everybody gets to grow into discipleship, into this partnership with God in cultivating wellbeing everywhere – that's what this God's salvation brings – and *they* are not finished with us yet – more reforming and transforming in the works – Jesus, as John emphasized, sent the Spirit to teach us even more about justice, kindness, and humility as we become ready for it (John 14:25)
- Knox Presbyterian in New West is one our collaborating churches – convening conversations among the Sessions about generating ways to support each other in mission in our distinct neighbourhoods – on their sign board this week, these words appeared – 'Just love everyone. I'll sort 'em out later. God' – maybe, just maybe, that's nailed it - maybe

Your Notes

Prayers of Thanks – for the sun and warmth that brings to flower and leaf so much of your beautiful creation – for the warmth of welcome you extend to such a wide diversity of people here at Brentwood – for this space that is serving the community more and more every day, as children learn, musicians practice and perform, citizens converse, and your Spirit falls on all of them with your grace - (silence to consider this)

Prayers for Help – for those who face the trauma of rejection and isolation through ruptured relationships - – we remember especially Jamie, the friends of Colin, all those who face loss and disease - (silence to consider this)

Prayers for Awe – at who you love – who you want in your Commonwealth – who you want participating in the blessing of this creation - (silence to consider this)