

Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, Mar 10, 2019 – Lent 1

Are We Wandering in the Wilderness?

(Psalm 27 with Refrain #1)



**You will hide me in your shelter
in the day of trouble;
you will conceal me
under the cover of your tent;
you will set me high on a rock.
(Psalm 27:5)**

A lesson from Psalm 27

Stuart Macdonald is alarmed! – not panicked, not terrorized, not frozen in fear, but alarmed – he thinks the church in Canada, and especially The Presbyterian Church in Canada, is having trouble accepting the new religious realities that surround them – as I imagined it after listening to his reflections over the past couple of days and the conversations that they inspired, we're in a wilderness where we have never been before – here are the characteristics of that wilderness in Canada – a increasing proportion of people, especially younger people, do not believe in any god – an increasing proportion of people do not value institutional religion of any kind – an increasing proportion of people frame meaning in their lives through the lenses of individualism, materialism, and consumerism – the phrase often used as an umbrella term for all of this is 'secularism' – a complex, multi-layered, and multi-faceted phenomenon, but very real – and for the church, in most ways we have imagined it in the past, a confusing and confounding wilderness experience – in this sense, we are wandering in the wilderness where do we find 'shelter' and 'direction' – the comfort of companionship and the courage of direction

Provocative points to ponder – as always, too many to cram into one sermon

- Let me just focus on one particular aspect of that wilderness experience that has caught my attention lately – it's the depression and despair of young people in their teens and twenties that leads to thoughts of suicide and, far too often, to attempts at suicide – Jill in conversation with one of our granddaughters, a young musician who has played here wanting to do a benefit concert for the Crisis Centre BC and their suicide prevention work – another young musician who has found in the way we embody the Gospel here at Brentwood a new light of hope in his life and work – there is something about this God who welcomes us week after week, who generates wonder in us at the quality of love offered, that sows the seeds of wisdom in our awareness, and that guides us, one conversation after another, into witnessing to the Kingdom or Commonwealth that was the primary passion of our Lord throughout his ministry
- Rick Reynolds and I are just beginning our conversations about how to name this new community of humanity that God created in Jesus Christ and that the Holy Spirit

continue to fashion among us – ‘Kingdom’ is the proper English translation of the words used by Jesus and the early Christian writers – ‘Commonwealth’ seems to me to capture the intent of that language better – but we will continue the conversation – that’s how we learn from each other – the important point for this morning is that following Jesus through this new wilderness that is upon us, this wilderness of secularity, means finding shelter and direction in this community of God’s people where we find a home in hope for wholeness

How does this all relate to our witness as a fellowship of the friends of Jesus?

That’s the phrase that came to me last night as I was reflection on Stuart’s words of wisdom and the conversations they provoked this weekend – a home in hope for wholeness – in that wilderness so filled with fears, we are not alone – we are sheltered under the tent of God’s steadfast love – we are taken up high on the rocks to see a hopeful future – and we are guided towards that future by the constant provocations of the Holy Spirit – so, as we ponder our faith through this season of Lent, we will come back over and over again to the central affirmations of this psalm – God is our home – in God we find hope – and in God we grow into wholeness

My Notes

My Prayers

