

Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, Mar 31, 2019 – Lent 4

What Are the Benefits of Cleansing?

(Psalm 32 with Refrain #2)



Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not hide my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
and you forgave the guilt of my sin.
(Psalm 32:5)

A lesson from Psalm 32

Here's the story I imagined behind this picture – people working in hot fields, caked with a grimy layer of dust and dried sweat – burdened with the monotony of forced labour and the mire of fields of sugar cane – they have been sinned against for their whole lives – and in that complex set of twisted relationships, they sin against each other and themselves – and in so doing, they sin against their Creator – then the Creator sends a torrential downfall – rain that cools and cleans – the caked grime is washed away – the joy of such cleansing erupts from the depths of the soul – and all of this is a gift – a reviving gift from their Creator, who remains determined to bring them all back home to the household of justice, kindness, and humility

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

- We had an interesting conversation at our Bible study on Friday night – it centred around whether we confess in order to be forgiven or do we confess because we are forgiven – is confession a requirement for forgiveness or a gift of forgiveness? – I acknowledge that many in the Christian community over the centuries have insisted that confession is a condition of forgiveness – and I disagree – I think that God's free and unconditional reconciliation of the world to its original dynamics of mutual benefit means that confessing how we have messed up God's intentions is gift rather than condition – that's what Paul is affirming in his letters to the Corinthian church – saints who are stuck in nasty factions and fights – and he reminds them that they have been reconciled in Christ – the Trinity does not count their trespasses against them – and in order to live into their full potential as ambassadors of the gift of forgiveness, they are honest about their sin as a way of healing from it – that is a deeply reviving source of joy – as reviving as a cool torrent of rain in the midst of dry and dusty sugar field

- But, you may be saying, how can you possibly restore morality in our society without the threat of punishment, without the restrictions of laws that must be obeyed in order to get approval and acceptance? – don't we all need the 'bit and bridle' mentioned in the psalm to control us?- Paul's answer, throughout his pastoral reflections and advice to the early communities that were working through what it meant to follow Jesus as Lord, is 'No!' – you are no longer mules and horses who need to be restrained – you are beloved children of God who are freed for joy, so you can do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God – in that dignity and worth, you show up in this world as ambassadors of God's reconciliation in Jesus Christ

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

In the face of the fears that so many are propagating these days – in face of the restrictions that so many are propagating these days – in face of the tyrannies that so many are propagating these days – the Gospel of Jesus Christ says simply that you are forgiven, freed from the complex contortions of human relationships that our rebellions against God have created over the centuries – in that freedom, you can confess the mess and work with the Trinity to become ever more faithfully ambassadors of our reconciliation in every relationship we are given – that is the joy of forgiveness, the revival of cleansing

My Notes

My Prayers

