

Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, Apr 28, 2019

What Is God's Cause? (Psalm 74)



**Rise up, O God, plead your cause;
remember how the impious scoff at you
all day long.
(Psalm 74:22)**

A lesson from Psalm 74

When God rises up to plead his cause, this is what he looks like – consider that for a moment – no royal robes, no crown of bejewelled gold, no retinue of the best legal minds in the realm, no booming voice of bravado in presenting the case – his final summation, his closing plea, is submission to being executed on a cross, whispering his last words from a parched throat, finally giving up his spirit with one final laboured breath – our picture this morning was drawn by John Stuart – a Scot ministering with an American Presbyterian congregation in Tennessee – this rendering of Jesus on God's Friday reminds me of ritual masks in indigenous cultures – respect for the power in the being represented – this mask, for me, represents the endurance of and conquest over the scoffing and suffering imposed by those who try to remake God in their own image and for their own purposes – in the midst of their times' version of this rebellion against the triune God, the community that preserved this psalm plead with God to defend his cause – and this is how he showed to do that – this is the last of the faithful Israelites witnessing to the heritage of the Creator's desires and launching a new humanity to carry on that witness – an we, here in this little congregation in the midst of a city full of scoffers, if they even have the interest to scoff, have inherited that mission of pleading God's cause – of gaining a hearing for the redeeming truth that this God seen most clearly in the events of Easter has reconciled the whole world to the kinds of relationships intended in creation

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

- But what is God's cause? – that's a crucial question throughout the Scriptures that we search weekly for grace and guidance in the midst of widespread misrepresentations of Jesus and increasing indifference to the purpose and practices that Christians have deemed crucial to flourishing as authentic human beings – clarity about this purpose and consistency in participating in these

practices remains important as we devote ourselves to being ambassadors of this heritage of our loving Creator

- I think we had a powerful reminder of God's cause last week in Ben's baptism service – it was also a renewal of our own baptismal vows – a pray of gratitude for the way God is ordering our lives to make us ambassadors of the reconciling love of the triune God, that Trinity Trio that models for us the good pleasures of their reconciling love – let me remind us of some of the key phrases in that service – there are still some copies at the back if you want to take one home and consider it prayerfully this week as a reminder of who we are becoming in Jesus Christ – we claimed that, in baptism, we “join God's rebellion against our rebellions that have marred and traumatized this good earth for generations. We promise to grow into the gifts of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).” – we praised Jesus “for calling us to be participants in your mission of bringing in the Commonwealth of God, where welcome, worth and wisdom nourish all peoples.”

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

The question our psalm is provoking among us this morning is really about our participation in God's cause – the scoffers in our circles of influence often have good cause to be dismissive – in the interviews we have been doing over these past several months among those involved in jazz worship services, we found many have had troubling and traumatic experiences with the church – a lot of this arises from a sense of hypocrisy – you talk about God's love and exclude my passions and struggles or try to force them into the easy answers that make you comfortable with your definition of God's cause – here at Brentwood, I pray, we are taking a more open attitude towards participating in God's cause – one that is comfortable with respectful dialogue with those who are scoffing at their understanding of the Gospel – one that is open to learning from the ways the Spirit is working outside the church – one that welcomes everyone who comes into this little space of grace and prays that the triune God will use us to further God's cause in all that we do

My Notes

My Prayers

