

Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, May 5, 2019 – Holy Communion

What is the Lord's Counsel?

(Psalm 16 with Refrain #1)



You show me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.
(Psalm 16:11)

A lesson from Psalm 16

This is a psalm about where we find the insight to flourish in a world filled with insistent claims on our loyalties – promoters, advocates for a cause, politicians, evangelists and mass media ministries, all clamour for your time, talent, and treasure – especially for your treasure, to enable them to claim increasing numbers to their counsel – these claims are carefully crafted with sophisticated research into how those who generate them think they can best manipulate the awareness and choices of their target markets – in our secularizing culture, the appeals are increasingly focused on your individual self-interest, on your exclusive tribe's well-being, on your dominance and delight – this psalm is a wake-up call in the midst of these confusing competitions for your loyalties – your joy and pleasure, it states boldly, is found in the security of your relationship with the God of Israel who we know most profoundly in the person of Jesus Christ – that relationship is a gift – it has been given to you by God and cannot be taken from you – you can ignore it, reject it, demean it – but you cannot get rid of it – God's love for you is the life-breath of this whole creation - the Lord's counsel in these words is, "Come to me for refuge, especially in the traumatic confusion caused by my creatures' rebellion against my counsel. In conversation with me, you will find your true purpose and the practices that enable you to walk with me in my paths of delight."

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

- Our picture this morning is from a production of Jesus Christ Superstar – I don't want to get into the controversies that surrounded that various productions of this popular musical – for this morning's ponderings, it's the doubts and distress of Judas over the counsel that Jesus was offering that drew my attention to this scene at the last supper – following this conversation over a meal, Judas goes out to betray Jesus and the rest of his disciples abandon him – their loyalties to his counsel are shaken and destroyed – but only for the moment – God's persuasive powers do not give up – in the midst of this devastating disillusionment, God's counsel remains steady – in word, in deed, in love, in

companionship, Jesus stays with his disciples and followers to shape and form them further as ambassadors of God's reconciling love in a world of bitter division – it is counsel to love God, love others, and love yourself – that is the path of life – staying on that path, with an increasing awareness of the triune God as our constant companion and counsel, we grow into a fullness of joy in God's good pleasures

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

I've been reading and reflecting on Thomas Merton's talks to nuns and monks in Alaska just before he went to Thailand, where he tragically died in 1968 at the age of 53 – then I started reading from a book of daily meditations from his writings that I've had for years – I think I got it on sale at the Regent College bookstore – this morning's reading was about Paul the Hermit (227-342) – the first desert monk – here are some of the words Merton penned as he read Jerome's life of Paul – “A beautiful piece of writing, with deep mystical and psychological implications – so that whether or not it is ‘historical’ is irrelevant. It awakens a kind of inner awareness of psychic possibilities which one so easily forgets and neglects. The return to unity, to the ground, the paradisaical inner sacred space where the archetypal [person] dwells in peace and in God. The journey to that space, through a realm of aridity, dualism, dryness, death. The need of courage and of desire. Above all faith, praise, obedience to the inner voice of the Spirit, refusal to give up or to compromise. ...What is ‘wrong’ in my life is ...a matter of *unawareness*, lostness, slackness, relaxation, dissipation of desire, lack of courage and decision, so that I let myself be carried along and dictated by an alien movement. The current of ‘the world,’ which I know is not mine. I am always being diverted into a way that is not my way and is not going where I am called to go.” – I hope you found in that reading something of the counsel of the Lord that I found this morning – and we will be fed yet again by that amazing grace here at the Lord's table this morning – so come, all is prepared

My Notes

My Prayers

