

# Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, June 30, 2019

**Disturbing the City**  
(Ps 16 and Acts 16:16-24)



**When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe.”**  
(Acts 16:20)

## Insights from the story within the story

Acts is an account of how the early Christian communities disrupted the cities where they were seeded and cultivated – they posed a challenge because they saw things differently and acted differently – in the face of exploitation and exclusivism, they practiced and promoted justice – the face of cruelty and violence, they practiced and promoted kindness – in the face of arrogant conviction, they practiced and promoted humble learning – in this household of God that is the whole creation, they responded in gratitude to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit and were formed into a new family of God's beloved children and friends, reconciled into a new relationship with their Creator that restored the intimacy of the triune God's original intent and blessing – Paul and Silas (and one gets the sense from the way this passage is written, Luke as well) encountered a community where religious fakery and exploitation were going on and challenged it directly – for that disturbing of a profitable practice, they were jailed and charged – the religious and political powers of that place and time did not want any part of the changes and reforms that these disruptive Christians were advocating and modeling – the crowds joined the leaders in rejecting the invitation to see and act differently – and these ambassadors for the reconciling love of God in Jesus Christ were flogged, jailed in the deepest, darkest cell, and put into stocks – these early Christians were a disturbing lot!

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

- The question that provoked me all week as I considered this text in the light of Canada Day weekend, 2019, was what kinds of faithful disturbances should we be causing in our city – in the face of the exploitation and exclusivism, of the cruelty and violence, of the arrogant polarized convictions that we see and hear every day in our circles of influence, how should we disturb those realities with the aspirations of the Gospel?

- *Vancouver Sun* columnist Daphne Bramham wrote this about Canada in her column on Friday:

*...we are an aspirational country with people striving for reconciliation, for peaceful diversity, and prosperity that's shared not only at home but internationally.*

Jill drew that to my attention on Friday morning and said it might be a good quote to put into a sermon – I agreed! – if we were to take the values of reconciliation, peaceful diversity, and shared prosperity into all of our circles of influence as we lived and moved and had our beings in God's world, we would disrupt the attitudes and behaviours that shape so much of our common lives these days – think of it for a moment – reconciliation rather than polarization – peace rather than war – well-being for all rather than the growing wealth divide that we tolerate and thereby enable – when we delight in God's desire for justice, kindness, and humility, we are going to be a disturbing presence in our city – but what's interesting and encouraging is that the Spirit, in her infinite wisdom and surprising ways, has already sown the seeds of that different way of being in our midst – the garden has been sown with the seeds of the Kingdom of God – will we accept the privilege of cultivating them?

### **How does this apply to our mission here at Brentwood?**

The core conviction that guided the early church was that "Jesus is Lord" – that was the confession that drew and held them together – we'll find them disagreeing as they attempted to discern what this means in their times and places, but they all hold to this seminal experience - to appreciate Jesus as Lord is to disrupt any other claims to authority – in the Christian tradition, we've called loyalty to anything else idolatry – that approach to life is rooted in the first of the 10 permissions/commandments – "You shall have no other gods but Me" – following the triune God of reconciling love as Lord of our lives makes us disturbing forces in this city – on this Canada Day weekend in 2019, I pray that Brentwood will become ever more faithfully a safe space where this kind of disturbing can be honoured and honed

### **My Notes**

### **My Prayers**

