

Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, June 16, 2019

How Does Paul Imagine the Church?

(Ps 27 and Acts 20:25-35)



And now I commend you to God and the message of his grace, a message that is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all who are sanctified.
(Acts 20:32)

Insights from the story within the story

One of the most difficult questions I get asked when speaking to people who are considering the possibilities of participating in the church here at Brentwood is this – “Why there are so many brands or branches of the church in this day and age?” – “Why so much division?” – “Why in those divisions is there so much derisive dismissal of those who hold differing understandings of the Gospel and its implications for the life of this creation?” – I find those questions hard to answer, especially hard to answer in a simple way – and I’ve spent most of my life studying the history of this treasure in earthen vessels that is the church – so, what I’ve decided to focus on for the next year or so is the ways in which the apostles, especially Paul and Peter, discerned with the early Christian communities the nature of this community that the Holy Spirit drew together at Pentecost – a community made up of people who underwent a radical conversation from former loyalties, attitudes, and behaviours to be built up by the triune God in that God’s reconciling grace – in a wide variety of ways, through a wide variety of influences, as we shall see, they became convinced that God had reconciled the world to himself in Christ and that they were gifted with the significance of being ambassadors (*presbeuo*) or bearers of that message – being the ambassadorial corps for Jesus Christ infused and informed their whole lives, everything they did, every breath they took – and practices of worship, learning, fellowship, and service kept shaping and reshaping them for faithful discipleship – that’s what Acts is all about – that’s what makes it worth a year of attention

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

- All of this bearing of the message of reconciling grace, and that is the core purpose of our work as a church, is a gift from God, energized by God, guided by God, and formed and reformed by God, and for God – it's not about us and our salvation alone – it's about the salvation of the whole creation – the rebellions that led to the mess our ancestors made of this world, and that we continue to make of it, were forgiven in Jesus Christ – new possibilities emerge and are at work, through the work of the Holy Spirit – the inheritance of justice, kindness, and humility that truly delights God is available to all of us, each in our own unique authenticity – we realize that potential best by identifying with Jesus and his fellowship of friends that is the church – within that community, we are best nourished to flourish in reconciling grace – and when we align with God's desires for God's creation, we find most fully our own salvation – that's how I think we will find the people whose stories are recorded in Acts imagining the church – that's especially true of the major figures featured in these accounts, Peter and Paul

How does this apply to our mission here at Brentwood?

Let's read our text again in light of these reflections:

And now I commend you to God and the message of his grace,
a message that is able to build you up
and to give you the inheritance among all who are sanctified.

It's a passage taken from one of Paul's farewell speeches before he goes off to Rome for his final imprisonment – it focuses his hearers attention on God's reconciling grace, on how that message can build them up in the midst of indifference, resistance, and persecution, and on how we are being sanctified by the inheritance of all God's gifts through the work of the Holy Spirit – we have inherited that mantle here at Brentwood – we stand in continuity with those early Christians who were praying and thinking through what the presence of the living Word of God, Jesus Christ, meant for their world and their lives in it – what did it mean for them to be invited into a flourishing life by a God who was with them, listened to them, cared about them, and prayed for them? – and what does it mean for us? – that's what we will explore together over this coming year

My Notes

My Prayers

