

Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, July 14, 2019

God's Deeds of Power

(Ps 82 and Acts 2:14-36)



**You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say:
Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God
with deeds of power, wonders, and signs
that God did through him among you,
as you yourselves know ...**

(Acts 2:22)

Insights from the story within the story

Let's remember again the big story that is unfolding in Acts – *it's the story of the spread of the impact of God's reconciling love embodied in Jesus of Nazareth, God's Messiah (in Hebrew) or Christ (in Greek) – the One in whom the Creator of all that is takes a decisive action to save the world and continues to work out the implementation of that reconciling love among those to whom he entrusted the care of the world* – let me repeat that big story line, because it's crucial to how we will read the specifics of God's deeds of power over this coming year - *it's the story of the spread of the impact of God's reconciling love embodied in Jesus of Nazareth, God's Messiah (in Hebrew) or Christ (in Greek) – the One in whom the Creator of all that is takes a decisive action to save the world and continues to work out the implementation of that reconciling love among those to whom he entrusted the care of the world* – the purpose of those deeds of power is to bring people together, to reconcile or join them together across all of the boundaries you can imagine that divide peoples from each other and from their lands on this earth – everything we can imagine together about the redemptive work of this God must align with the power of reconciling love – it's not so much the details of how people understood and communicated that power in the social imaginaries of their times and places – instead, it's the reconciling/joining purposes of God to which these wonders and signs point – a new humanity joined in a common mission of justice and kindness with a deep humility about how much we still have to unlearn and learn about living in God's new reality to which we are called to witness in all our circles of influence

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

- The deeds of power Peter refers to in this address took place in a complex social context – Willie Jennings, who teaches theology and Afro-American studies at Yale, highlighted two of those social dynamics in the course he taught at VST last week – one was ‘diaspora’ – the other was ‘empire’ – in the first way of being in the world, he focused on the Jewish people who were scattered throughout the Roman world, seeking to preserve their identity as a people of God through strict discipline and obedience to the rules and rituals that defined their identity in their minds – in the second way of being in the world, he focused on the Gentiles (all those who were not Jews) and their compliance with the means by which the Romans exercised their power and control – in both cases, God’s reconciling love challenged their way of being in the world and transgressed the boundaries they had established to remain pure or in power – breaking down the boundaries to expand our understanding of the new humanity that God desires is the major thread that runs through the stories of Acts – the big story into which all the smaller ones fit – it was a challenging message in Luke’s day, at the end of the first century – it’s a challenging message in our day, at the beginning of the twenty-first century – but it is the message with which we are entrusted – the message for which we are ambassadors (*presbeuo*)

How does this apply to our mission here at Brentwood?

This message of God’s reconciling love in Jesus Christ continues to challenge us, week by week, here at Brentwood – where are we justifying and perpetuating the divisions among humans that make us feel pure or secure? – Acts, in many ways, is a collection of stories about that kind of challenge and the resistance to it – I pray our engagement with those stories over the next several months deepens our trust in the desire of God for the joining of all peoples and the whole world that we see so powerfully portrayed in He Qi’s painting this morning – male & female, Jew & Gentile, slave & free, joined together in Jesus Christ to be the humanity in whom God delights

My Notes

My Prayers

