

# **Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church**

**Sun, July 21, 2019**

## **God's Promise in Abraham**

**(Ps 52 and Acts 3:11-26)**



**You are the descendants of the prophets  
and of the covenant  
God gave to your ancestors,  
saying to Abraham, "And in your descendants  
all the families of the earth shall be blessed."  
(Acts 3:25)**

### **Insights from the story within the story**

Let me be clear about my views – there is nothing about this detention centre in El Paso, Texas, or similar centres around the world these days, that in any way, shape, or form represents a faithful response of gratitude for God's gift of the covenant that Peter is talking about in this speech at the temple in Jerusalem – nothing – period – end of evaluation – this is not an acceptable action if you are striving to bless all the families of the earth – and that is the heart of covenant and the prophets who called their people to return to it – it's interesting that Luke continually confronts his first readers/hearers, and all those since, with this focus of the message of the earliest Christians – return to loyalty to the God who gave you, as gift, the covenant with Abraham and Sarah – turn from your other loyalties, no matter how dearly held, and find your authentic vocation in being a blessing to all the families of the earth – there's not a lot of wiggle room in that call – it's pretty clear – your reason for being, the reason God gave you the breath of life and all the capabilities that are uniquely yours, is so that you could imagine a multitude of ways to bless this creation and all its families – there is no 'them' and 'us' here – only a comprehensive and compassionate 'us'

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

I want to make two points this morning for your further consideration

- In a social, economic, and political culture that is becoming increasingly polarized and partisan, for a whole set of complex reasons that I don't understand completely, to be loyal to the God who gave this covenant to Abraham and Sarah for the benefit of all the families of the earth is to be different and even dangerous – in being ambassadors of this message of reconciliation, turning from other

ways of seeing and being in the world, we will meet some of the same reactivity and resistance we will find happening in Acts – we'll have more to say about that as we move further into that story as it speaks to ours

- As I was pondering the dynamics of loyalty this week, I remembered a conversation that I had with my Dad – he was a quiet man – we didn't have a lot of deep conversations – but when we did, they made a profound impact – in the conversation I remembered this week, he encouraged me to become a Mason, like him – he saw it as a way of developing the discipline of being a blessing – it didn't compete with, but complemented his faith and work in the church as a ruling elder and Clerk of Session at our home congregation in Niagara Falls – I didn't join because of others interests and commitments, but the soul of the conversation stuck with me – we have all sorts of lesser loyalties in our lives through which we are true to our ultimate loyalty to God to be blessings to all the families of the earth – those loyalties are blessed as they become means by which we participate in the greater gift of God's covenant with Abraham

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

Let's remember, for a moment, who's speaking in this speech and where he is speaking – Peter was a Jew – finally, after a very tortured set of struggles with who this Jesus was and how he was inviting Peter to be a faithful Jew, he has been gifted with some clarity about the covenant that gave his life its purpose and the practices that would nourish that purpose – that's what he's sharing in these speeches – he's saying to his original hearers and, through their faithful record keeping, to us, "You are the heirs of God's reconciling love, a love that is intended to enable and equip you to bless all the families of the earth. Now, let's get on with it together." – "Bless all the families of the earth" – that's a pretty clear, if challenging, response of gratitude to God for giving us the covenant

### **My Notes**

### **My Prayers**

