

Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, July 7, 2019

Living into a New Reality

(Ps 30 and Acts 1:1-14)



**But you will receive power
when the Holy Spirit has come upon you;
and you will be my witness in Jerusalem,
in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.
(Acts 1:8)**

Insights from the story within the story

It's hard for us, with our imaginations shaped so powerfully by modern Western ways of knowing, to understand the *Acts of the Apostles* the way its original readers and hearers would have received it – we are often looking for what individual human beings are doing to make things happen – we focus on particular protagonists who generate the drama of a story told by a single author – from that point of view, Acts is a book written by Luke about Peter and Paul creating the early church by their heroic actions in the face of great resistance and suffering – they attract, through individual choice, a faithful following that spreads the church to the ends of the earth - that's how I remember learning the story – and it was mostly about Paul, as I was taught it – I still have a vague memory of that map of Paul's missionary journeys up on the wall of the Sunday School room - but I no longer think that way of reading the book gets us to the heart of the matter – this is not a book about heroic humans founding a church – it's a book about God, in the work of the Holy Spirit, forming a community that will bless creation by modelling the new way of being human God revealed in Jesus, the Christ – that sentence is a bit of a mouthful, so let me repeat it again - it's a book about God, in the work of the Holy Spirit, forming a community that will bless creation by modelling the new way of being human God revealed in Jesus, the Christ – it's about inviting people to live in a new reality in which love of God, love of neighbour, and love of self come together in a joyful redemption for the whole of creation – there's a sustained energy and excitement in this book that can come only from the desire of God for reconciliation with the whole creation – that's what I think the original audience for this book heard and imagined – I hope we can do the same over the next several months

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

- So, what's happening here in Acts if it's not the heroic story of a few individuals creating an expanding and effective church - what the great organizational guru, Peter Drucker, called the most successful organization in human history – what's happening here is that the Holy Spirit is disrupting the world as it had become with the invitation to become what God desired it to be – and that God, through manifestations of reconciling love experienced in Jesus of Nazareth and in the Holy Spirit, was and continues to be the main protagonist in redeeming the creation – one perceptive commentator argues that this book should really be named *The Acts of the Holy Spirit* – there is some real wisdom in that
- The other thing to keep an ear out for as we dig more deeply into this story is how disruptive this witness of the triune God is to the way things are – it was a whole new reality for the whole of creation that began in Jesus Christ – it continues today – it's a reforming of God's creation to make it into the place of intimacy among God, humans, and other created beings and things that God intended in the first place – to the degree that we have defaced, demeaned, and distorted the original goodness of creation through our ingenious rebellions against God, we need the kinds of disruptions to our habits of living that we will find people experiencing in *Acts*

How does this apply to our mission here at Brentwood?

The Spirit has set the Lord's table here in God's household with the good God has chosen to feed us in a special way for this mission of disruption – I found myself thinking this week of that provocative prayer of St Francis:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me bring love.
Where there is offense, let me bring pardon.
Where there is discord, let me bring union.
Where there is error, let me bring truth.
Where there is doubt, let me bring faith.
Where there is despair, let me bring hope.
Where there is darkness, let me bring your light.
Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.

May we be fed this morning to be these kinds of disruptions in all our circles of influence