

Notes for Brian's Sermon at Kerrisdale Presbyterian Church

Sun, Sept 15, 2019

Becoming Church in a Secularizing City

(Ps 47 and 2 Corinthians 5:16-21)



... that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.
(2 Cor 5:19-20)

Insights from the story within the story

I am here this morning to mess with your souls – I believe deeply in the commission with which we are confronted in our text this morning – be the ambassadors of God's reconciling and forgiving love for the whole world – because God has decided, in God's wisdom, to make that appeal through you, and me, and everyone else who gathers for worship as a Christian church – let that news settle into your souls for a minute – do you really see it as "good" news? – do you feel equipped and capable of being "ambassadors"? – are you clear about the purposes, policies, and positioning that your "state" wants you to take? – if you're anything like me, your answers to those questions are mixed, tentative, hesitant – I don't always see it as "good" news that I have to be God's presence in and for the world – that's demanding work – I don't always feel equipped and capable of representing Jesus Christ faithfully in all of my interactions with this creation – that's way beyond my skill level – I don't always feel confident that I know everything I should know to be a witness to what God is doing in the world – and, if I read Paul's letters to the Corinthian churches carefully, I'm pretty sure they had the same misgivings – that's why the Spirit messed with their souls by making her appeal through Paul – and that's why the Spirit continues to mess with our souls this morning in this worshiping – so it's not really me messing with your souls – it's the triune God who has privileged us with being ambassadors of the forgiving love that reconciles the world to God, to each other, and to the authentic selves God wants us to become – here are a couple of points worth pondering, among many we could ponder, as we consider becoming church ever more faithfully here at Kerrisdale in this secularizing city

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

- We are ambassadors, not the ruling power – that power is Jesus Christ, as Presbyterians have affirmed over the centuries, the only "King and Head of the

Church” – whatever we do to faithfully represent that power, we are invited (interestingly, not coerced) to let our presence in the world be formed and reformed by the forgiving and reconciling love we see most clearly on the cross – and especially in Jesus’ prayer that his executioners be forgiven – let that reality mess with your souls for a moment – the ruling power that we represent desires forgiveness for those who seek to eliminate him through state violence – that messes with some growing social norms that demand that we demonize and destroy – so, becoming church is about seeking to grow into this good news that God is love so we can be faithful companions of Jesus as he redeems the world through justice, kindness, and humility

- There is something of special importance for Canadian Presbyterians in this passage, something of special importance for those of us gathered here at Kerrisdale – the Greek word that Paul uses for ‘ambassador’ in this passage is *presbeuo* – it’s one of the forms of the source word from which we get ‘Presbyterian’ – so, our New Testament roots as a branch of Christ’s church come from this decision of God to make God’s appeal through us – to make us ambassadors of Christ’s forgiving and reconciling love in and for the world – and every time we worship, the Spirit continues to mess with our souls to reform them so we can do that ever more faithfully – we are constantly becoming what God in Christ through the Spirit desires us to become – a constant process of learning and growth

How does this apply to our mission here at Kerrisdale?

We live in Canada’s most rapidly secularizing urban region – growing indifference, with some hostility, to the organized church – in the midst of a bewildering array of alternative understandings of reality and how it works, or doesn’t – that’s our new context – dramatically different from the days when this facility was built for our work as ambassadors of Christ’s forgiving and reconciling love – maybe, just maybe, we need to become church in ways these facilities no longer serve well – maybe, just maybe, the Spirit is messing with our assumptions and convictions about how best to be church and calling us out onto the road, into the world, in a new way to continue, as we say in our purpose statement, the reconciling ministry of Jesus Christ – I leave you to imagine those possibilities as the Spirit continues to mess redemptively with your souls

My Notes

My Prayers

