

Notes for Brian's Sermon at West Van Presbyterian Church

Sun, Oct 20, 2019 – An Exchange Sunday

Strengthening Souls

(Ps 121 and Acts 14:21-28)



There they strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continue in the faith, saying, “It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God.” And after they had appointed elders for them in each church, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe.

(Acts 14:22-23)

Insights from the story within the story

In the midst of a year of exploring what the Spirit can teach us about being church in Canada's most rapidly secularizing urban region – how did the Spirit strengthen souls in those early urban settings where the fellowship of the friends of Jesus (Jurgen Moltmann's wonderful description of the church) spread in the midst of indifferent and resistance – Acts tells key instructive stories about what the Spirit did in and through that early Christian community, with all of its diversity, disputes, and distress – how the Spirit strengthened souls to be ambassadors of the message of God's forgiving and reconciling love for the world in Jesus Christ – the summary of our mission that Canadian Presbyterians consider to be the great affirmation of the gospel – cf 2 Cor 5:19-20 – when are souls are truly strengthened, they are strengthened to participate in and contribute to that mission

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

- How do you understand your soul? – my view has been reformed by my reading of neuroscience – especially Daniel J Siegel – a leading practitioner in the field of interpersonal neurobiology – how awareness in relationships enables life to flourish – when instinctual, emotional, and intellectual awarenesses are aligned, there is wisdom – I think that integration is what the Scriptures mean by 'soul' – when that alignment is strengthened in and for relationships, we are growing in faith/trust in the God who is with us in Jesus Christ, made real for us by the Holy Spirit
- The ways in which souls are strengthened in Acts, as people grow into their participation in and contribution to the kingdom of God, or kin-dom of God as many are beginning to think of it, happen primarily in community, in relationship, in collaboration in the forgiving and reconciling work of Jesus Christ in and for the

world – think again of the little snippet that we read this morning from that chronicle of the Spirit’s work in spreading the impact of God’s forgiving and reconciling love seen most clearly in our crucified Lord – it’s about the vitality of the community in serving its mission in the midst of resistance – you don’t do it on your own, as an isolated individual, for your own good – it’s done in community, with others, for the healing and flourishing of the whole world – this strengthening of our souls comes from the Lord, as Ps 121 affirms so powerfully, who made heaven and earth, the Lord who meets us and makes us in the most profound regions of our souls

How does this apply to our mission here at West Van Pres?

I pray that what we have talked about this morning has an impact on how you see church – how you become more deeply aware of and appreciative of what happens in this Christian community whose work and witness is centred here in this church – the right focus is there in our mission statement – “a lively, multi-generational community of hope and compassion, constantly growing in its faith and work through worship, service, and conversation” – being that kind of community, constantly aspiring to improve in the ways we do that, is the best way to strengthen souls – in continuity with the work of the Spirit in the early church – the same Spirit with the same mission, however different the context may be – we are still being formed by the Spirit, through this community, to be ambassadors of God’s forgiving and reconciling love for the whole world in Jesus Christ – I pray these reflections this morning, in the context of this worshiping, have contributed to that strengthening of your souls – Ben and I are deeply grateful for this invitation and for your hospitality

My Notes

My Prayers

