

***The Brentwood Bible Study Booklet  
Epiphany to Easter 2020***

***A Resource for Small Group or Personal Pondering***

Brentwood Presbyterian Church is a Christian community that seeks to nourish souls to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ through worship, learning, fellowship, and service.

We are participants in and ambassadors of God's remaking of this world, bringing the future into the present in ways that fulfill the promise of its original purpose. That purpose can be imagined as an ecosystem of evolving energy in which every element is growing into relationships that bless the whole. We are connected as kin in our relationships with God, with each other, with ourselves, and with our environment. The story we live within and learn about is the story of God's patient and steadfast love in fulfilling this promise. It is a love that transcends our wildest visions of belonging and allures us into new ways of being together as a fellowship of the friends of God.

At Brentwood, along with every other Christian gatherings of these friends, we trust and believe that the Creator acted decisively in Jesus Christ to reconcile the world to her/himself (no gendered language, however common, can fully capture the richness of the imagery for God found in the Scriptures). That reconciliation gave forgiveness of sin to humanity as gift, no conditions attached. That is the scandalous and foolish good news of the gospel. You are freed from your past to become a friend of God in Jesus Christ through the mysterious and miraculous workings of the Holy Spirit.

In our Bible studies, we engage in provocative conversations to explore the comforts and challenges of that freedom to be blessings to all of creation.

We gather at Brentwood for Bible study at 5:30pm, usually every other week, on a Friday evening. A light supper is served around 6:30pm as we continue to converse. We are finished by 7:00pm.

The dates and passages from the Scriptures that will form the focus for our conversations in the winter of 2020 are offered in this booklet, along with a question posed by our minister, Brian Fraser, a space for your notes on the passage, and a quote chosen to provoke your thinking about what the Spirit is saying to us about the story into which we are being drawn.

Through the fall and spring of 2019-2020, we are exploring Luke's account of God's story in Acts and, during the seasons of Advent/Christmas and Lent/Easter, in his Gospel. We will be looking for what those writings can teach us about being "the fellowship of the friends of Jesus.

Each passage will be used in our worshiping the following Sunday. Our Bible studies, then, become a part of the 'holy reading' (*lectio divina*) that we encourage weekly here at Brentwood in our Memorize and Ponder inserts in the Sunday bulletin.



It is a tried and tested Presbyterian tradition of discerning God's word for our time in community, fitting together the wisdom generated by the Spirit through participation in conversations. That is what we pray will happen when you join us for Bible study. Everyone, no matter where you are on your faith journey, is most welcome.

**Fri, Jan 10 – Acts 20:1-6**

### ***Encouraging the Believers***

***Brian's Question*** *In the midst of the ups and downs of initiating and nourishing Christian communities, most in cities, Paul encourages the believers and seekers. What kind of encouragement would strengthen your flourishing?*

***Your Reflections & Questions***

### ***A Provocative Consideration***

Paul now gathers together those who knew his ministry and shared his life. They are signs for the Spirit's working in him, and they represent a geographic spread of diaspora, Jew and Gentile together. This is the sign of gospel in effect – a mixed group moving in the same direction. What place is ready for such a group?

Willie James Jennings, *Acts*, p.128

**Fri, Jan 24 – Acts 21:27-36 – Reg Molnar convening**

### ***Opposition to the Gospel***

***Brian's Question*** *Acts is full of terrifying incidents in which the Holy Spirit's agents/ambassadors are harassed, abused, and imprisoned. How do you explain the opposition that the Gospel generates in these early years of the church's spread?*

***Your Reflections & Questions***

### ***A Provocative Consideration***

In his obedience to the heavenly vision, in risking everything to be true to what he had seen, in casting aside all concern for his personal well-being and safety to follow the divine leading, Paul is demonstrating his "Jewishness," his membership within a people who down through the ages have endeavoured to listen to God and to be obedient, even when faithfulness to God meant great suffering for them. Luke has nothing against "traditionalism." The issue is not whether we shall honour the tradition of the past. The issue is, *Which tradition is worth our whole mind and soul and strength?*

William H. Willimon, *Acts*, p.164

**Fri, Feb 7 – Acts 22:17-29 – Ben MacRae convening**

***Paul's Source of Courage***

***Brian's Question*** *As questions of Paul's identifying loyalties swirl around in this passage, where do you think his ultimate loyalty lies and how does that shape his identity?*

***Your Questions & Reflections***

***A Provocative Consideration***

In one sense this narrative turns on the question of Paul's identity. For the tribune and his colleagues, the fear is that Paul is an Egyptian revolutionary yields to knowledge that he is a Jew from Tarsus. And that knowledge in turn yields to the awareness (and new fear) that he is a Roman citizen. For the crowds that demand Paul's death both before and after his speech, Paul is a destroyer of the people, law, and temple. Paul identifies himself as a loyal Jew, who received a calling from the risen Messiah to be a witness to the Gentiles.

Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Acts*, p.310

**Fri, Feb 21 – Acts 24:10-23**

## ***Cheerful Witness***

***Brian's Question*** *What is it that makes you most cheerful about your faith/trust in God's kin(g)dom and communicating it?*

***Your Questions & Reflections***

### ***A Provocative Consideration***

What if God doesn't engineer our existence to accomplish specific, minutely defined ends? The Bible's talk about God's reliability and God's activity through our efforts pushes us to see God not as an invisible and irresistible force but on display in flesh-and-blood people and their attempts to express – to the degree anyone can – salvation's joy, justice, forgivingness, and renewal. This biblical language makes less a statement about how God operates and more a claim about how we come to glimpse God's presence and God's priorities in the midst of our activity and interpersonal interactions. Maybe a piece of the good news in Paul's case is that a person can glimpse this potential even while confined in custody.

Matthew L Skinner, *Intrusive God, Disruptive Gospel*, p.164

**Fri, Mar 13 – Luke 13:1-9 (Lent 3)**

## ***Cultivating Change***

***Brian's Question*** *How can we cultivate changes to ally ourselves with the unfolding of God's kin(g)dom? In other words, how do we develop disciples?*

***Your Questions & Reflections***

### ***A Provocative Consideration***

The tone of the parable emphasizes that patience and mercy temporarily keep judgment at bay. The role of the gardener offers a crucial characterization of this patience and mercy. The tree has not been left to its own devices. Everything possible is being done to get it to act as it should. Correspondingly, God does not leave people to their own resources but encourages their repentance. ... the parable's power comes through the suspense it generates. Will fruit emerge in time to thwart the ax? How will this season of second chances play itself out? How do the gardener's efforts make the tree's existence a state of grace and opportunity?

[https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=530](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=530) – an insight by Matthew L Skinner

**Fri, Mar 27 – John 12:1-8 (Lent 5)**

### ***A Lavish Foot Washing***

***Brian's Question*** *What acts of lavish devotion would be appropriate in today's circumstances?*

***Your Questions & Reflections***

#### ***A Provocative Consideration***

The story of Mary's anointing stands in contrast to the idea of many Christians today that what matters most is belief in Jesus -- and by belief we mean conscious, doctrinal understanding of Jesus. Mary's faithful action is different. John does not tell us what she believes, and it seems beyond human comprehension that she could understand all that will happen to Jesus, and all that her actions evoke. Yet we see her enact a faith that resonates deeply with what we know of Jesus' kingship and his death.

[https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1582](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1582) – an insight by Susan Hylan



As Canadian Presbyterians, we order our community life around the great affirmation of the Gospel's truth found in Paul's letters to the Corinthian Christians in the first century of the church's work and witness:

*"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; 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."*  
(2 Corinthians 5:18-20a)

Find out more about the work and witness of Brentwood at

[www.brentwoodpc.ca](http://www.brentwoodpc.ca)

**Sermons & Scriptures at Brentwood - Epiphany to Easter 2020**

**Jan 5 - Ps 148 & Matt 2:13-23 – Faith in the Time of Uncertainty**

**Jan 12 – Ps 29 & Luke 20:1-6 – Encouraging the Believers**

**Jan 19 – Ps 40:1-11 & Acts 21:1-16 – Christian Hospitality**

**Jan 26 – Ps 27 & Acts 21:27-36 – Opposition to the Gospel**

**Feb 2 – [Joanne Kim conducting worship]**

**Feb 9 – [Ben MacRae conducting worship]**

**Feb 16 – Ps 131 & Acts 23:12-22 – Enduring Intense Hatred**

**Feb 23 – Ps 99 & acts 24:10-23 – Cheerful Witness**

**Mar 1 – Ps 91:1-16 & Luke 4:1-13 – The Real Temptations of Modern Life – Lent 1**

**Mar 8 – Ps 27 & Luke 13:31-35 – Where’s Jesus? – Lent 2**

**Mar 15 – Ps 63:1-8 & Luke 13:1-9 – Cultivating Change – Lent 3**

**Mar 22 – Ps 32 & Luke 15:11-32 – Loneliness – Lent 4**

**Mar 29 – Ps 126 & John 12:1-8 – A Lavish Foot Washing – Lent 5**

**Apr 5 – Ps 118:19-29 & Luke 19:28-40 – Finding Your Voice to Praise – Palm Sunday**

**Apr 12 – Ps 114 & Luke 24:1-49 – He Is Risen! – Easter Sunday**