

Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, Jan 26, 2020

Opposition to the Gospel

(Ps 27 and Acts 21:27-36)



When Paul came to the steps,
the violence of the mob was so great
that he had to be carried by the soldiers.
The crowd that followed kept shouting,
“Away with him.”
(Acts 21:35-36)

Insights from the story within the story

Throughout the story of the spread of the early church told by Luke in Acts, the message of the Gospel generated opposition – this message was about a new way that God had chosen to break into human history – it was a change of strategy on the part of God in bringing creation into alignment with God's original vision for it – that vision was rooted in God's deep desire for companionship in enjoying the evolution of expression of infinite love and life – why would such a vision of love, knowledge, and beauty generate the kind of angry opposition we read about this morning? – and is there something in Paul's message that we need to acknowledge, accept, and live into more deeply ourselves?

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

- There is an important truth to emphasize as we begin this short exploration of why the gospel generates opposition – Paul's message is not just Jesus – it's not about a personality – that's a modern fixation – that somehow it's the individual person that is most important – your salvation lies in your obedient devotion to that person – Paul's message is Jesus' message – the reign or rule of God is among you and at work in a different way – your Creator, who made you to be part of a larger enterprise call “earth,” has taken your finite form to enlighten and elevate you into your true purpose in your Creator's original good vision – the message is about what God has done to redeem the whole creation – it includes

forgiving reconciliation with all humans as a crucial part of that redemption – it's about re-connecting you with God's desire for the whole creation and aligning you with its unfolding, enlisting your unique capabilities in its service

- Think for a moment of “the ways of the world” that run counter to the 9 Teachings of the Apostles, as I've been calling them – what, in your experience, runs counter to love, to joy, to peace, to patience, to kindness, to generosity, to faithfulness, to gentleness, and to self-composure, bringing all of these qualities of relationships together in a presence that blesses the whole world? – that vision of love and life threatened powerful attachments and alignments in Paul's communities, both religious and political – his message of God's work in Jesus generated angry opposition – there was a depth and urgency to this message that frightened people with a depth of change they resisted with great intensity – ironically, an intensity of opposition that had consumed Paul before he was confronted by God in Christ on the Damascus road – it took God's forgiving and reconciling love breaking into Paul's life of devoted rage to turn him into the ambassador for God's kin(g)dom he became – and God extends the same invitation to change to us

How does this apply to our mission here at Brentwood?

The change happens through our conversations – in the words that we choose, in the tone that we use, in the intent that motivates us – perhaps this is a way of considering the essence of this story for us in our day – we are invited, in carrying forward the legacy of Paul's ambassadorship, to model an alternative way of being in and for the world – not angry opposition that leads to bitter polarization, but a calm presence that invites people into a growing alignment with the desire of God for the well-being of the whole of creation – it's a challenging presence to imagine, to accept, and to grow into continually, one conversation after another – but it is the way the early church became ambassadors of God's inbreaking love in Jesus Christ, embodiments of the 9 Teachings of the Apostles – may we enhance our stewardship of this space here at Brentwood to nourish such conversations

My Notes



My Prayers