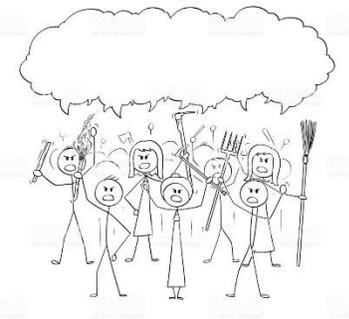


Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, Feb 16, 2020

Enduring Intense Hatred

(Ps 131 and Acts 23:12-22)



**In the morning the Jews joined in a conspiracy
and bound themselves by an oath
neither to eat nor drink
until they had killed Paul.
(Acts 23:12)**

Insights from the story within the story

I didn't learn this part of the story of the early church in Sunday School – conspiracies to assassinate were ignored – it was basically a story about nice people succeeding in making others better – there is so much more in Luke's account of the Spirit's work than I saw then – and it's that "more" that generates this angry and violent reaction – even to the point of some among the people who feel threatened by this new way of understanding and practicing faith in the God of Abraham, the God who created all humans to be blessings turning to violence to suppress and eliminate the reformers – indeed, it's well to remember Paul himself was one of them until he had his transformative encounter with the risen Christ – these conspirators might very well have been his former colleagues in crushing the followers of Jesus

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

- What's causing this hatred? – in many ways, it's the message – as Luke records defense of the Christian movement after defense, it's pretty simple but earth-shattering – all the promises upon which the Jewish faith is based are fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth – he is the Messiah, the One sent by God to bring in the Reign of God in a new way – recognize that and follow him – but in order to do that, you're going to have to leave behind a whole bunch of ways of thinking and acting – the cycle of all the anger that has fueled all the violence that has been broken in Jesus Christ – forgiveness and reconciliation are gifts now available to all – preach that and practice that – that's what God desires – and the people whose power and privilege will have to change because of that act of God are not willing to let go – they react to protect with an intensity that leads them to plots to assassinate

- What's the early Christian community's response? – it's not an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a murder for a murder – it's confidence in the life-giving power of God's forgiving and reconciling love, seen most clearly for humans in Jesus of Nazareth, God's Messiah (Hebrew) or Christ (Greek) – the appointed One to bring about a new age, a new way of being, a new humanity, and new heaven and a new earth – through the Spirit's work (which is what Acts is all about), this new way of being kin on this earth intrudes into the cycles of domination, oppression, control, greed, violence, and death that have entangled earthly life – aligning yourself with this new humanity in Christ, a gift available to all, is the way not just of enduring, but of overcoming all the intense hatred that surrounds the early followers of Jesus

How does this apply to our mission here at Brentwood?

At Brentwood, for the most part, we do not face this kind of intense hatred – I don't know of plots to assassinate any of us because of our faith – that is happening in other places around the world and we need to keep those situations in our prayers, but we do not face the kind of violence described in our story this morning – what we face is indifference and confusion – indifference to the importance of faith and confusion about the message of forgiving and reconciling love found in Jesus Christ – the response advocated in Acts to any negative response to the gifts of the gospel is perplexing and profound – just keep being God's love for yourself and others – no matter what is happening around you and to you, trust in the life-giving energy that is God to provide you with the essentials of true life, authentic flourishing, through the relationship with God, others, and yourself that nothing in this realm can kill – nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord – in that trust, we endure, indeed overcome, the worst that intense hatred, or even indifference, can dish out

My Notes

My Prayers

