

Words Forming Witnesses

The Light of the World

Psalm 91:9-16 and 2 Samuel 23:2-4
(712, 39, 773, 726)

February 17, 2013

Imagine the difference it would make
to your attitudes and actions
if the passage we have been memorizing and pondering this week
was written about you.

Listen to the passage once again
with this in mind.

*The spirit of the Lord speaks through **me**,
his word is upon **my** tongue.
The God of Israel has spoken,
The Rock of Israel has said to **me**:
“One who rules over people justly,
ruling in the fear of God,
is like the light of the morning,
like the sun rising on a cloudless morning,
gleaming from the rain on the grassy land.”*

This passage really is about you and I,
about us together as a church called to witness
to the grace of God
in everything we do.

“But how can that be?” you say.
This is clearly as passage about King David,
near the end of the Old Testament’s account of his formative leadership.
He has brought the people of Israel together,
formed them into a strong nation with solid institutions
that encourage reverence for God and justice for all.
That’s what “fear of God” means in the Bible,
not being afraid of God,
but being in awe, having reverence, showing devotion.
And if we live with that attitude of “fear,”
we will be just with each other.
We will see each and every human being
as a beloved child and friend of God,
created, both male and female, in the image of God.

But let's get back to the question of how this passage can be about us.

As the writers of the Scriptures remember
God's gracious and merciful relationship with humanity,
four names repeatedly come up –
Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus.

These are the people in whom the witnesses writing the Scriptures
saw the light of God shining most clearly.
Each had a particular role to play in the unfolding of God's redemptive purposes.
To Abraham came the core covenant of being a blessing to the creation.
To Moses came the call to lead God's people to freedom,
so the covenant with Abraham could be honoured.
To David came the task of community building,
putting in place the structures and systems that would
allow people to live their out their God-given freedom
with devotion and justice.

But human beings failed to uphold their side of the covenant.
Countless prophets, preaching and teaching God's word and ways,
were ignored or rejected
as God tried in vain to shape a people to flourish in his service.

Finally, in Jesus Christ, he took flesh to do it himself.
He reconciled humanity to himself.
He restored the original blessing of creation.
He made it possible,
in his own mysterious yet marvellous way,
for human beings to live as was originally intended,
in close companionship with God (devotion)
as stewards of the unfolding of creation (justice).

We were created to be one of the primary means
by which God acts in the world.
We were created to have God's Word on our tongues,
to have God speak to and through us
so that we live with each other in devotion and with justice.
When that happens,
life is like a bright morning
gleaming with the gracious radiance of God's steadfast love.

You see, in Jesus Christ, God drew us all
back into that original good relationship
that we memorized from the Genesis accounts,
where God saw that everything he had created was "very good."

In that relationship,
established and given as gift by God himself,
we can identify with David,
and with Abraham, Moses, and Jesus,
accepting as our calling their calling
to be a blessing, to journey to freedom,
to establish just ways of living together,
and to witness to the grace of all of this with our whole beings.

Just ponder what a difference it would make in your lives
if you really appreciated the gift contained in the idea
that this passage is about you,
every bit as much as it is about King David.

The Holy Spirit seeks to speak through you.
In every word you utter,
in every connection you make in conversation,
in every encounter you have with people during the week,
God wants to speak through you.

Will you let that happen?

Will you let God shape in you the devotion
that nourishes an intimate friendship with God in Jesus Christ?
Will you let God shape in you the practice of justice
in all your relationships with your fellow human beings
and with the creation that sustains our lives?
Will you, like David, take seriously
the building of communities
that model the *Shalom* or well-being
of people living in companionship with themselves, others, and God?
Will you find your true authenticity as a human being
in the delight of shining forth every morning
with the brilliant gleaming of the love of God,
no matter what dark clouds try to dull the light of God
gleaming within you and shining through you?

Those are the questions this passage confronts us with this morning.
They are questions that remind us of our true calling
to be friends of God who love the world.
They are questions that remind us of our true strength
in God's gracious acceptance
and of the Holy Trinity's restoration of our original relationship with them.

Christians around the world are observing the season of Lent,
a period of 40 days leading up to our remembering the events of Easter.

It is a period of penitence,
of acknowledging and seeking forgiveness afresh
for the many ways in which we have not been devout and just.

It is a time to remember and reject
the attitudes and actions
that get in the way of us being devout and just.

It is a time to remember and accept
the forgiveness and grace that God offers in Jesus Christ
that enables us to see and act differently.

I remember gratefully an incident that happened
soon after I arrived in Vancouver in the mid 1980s.

I think I've told you the story before,
but it bears repeating.

I was appointed interim-moderator at West Point Grey Presbyterian Church
to help them find a new minister.

I met with the session and asked them what they wanted in a new minister.

The last person to speak was the senior elder.

He was 88 years old.

For several years, he had needed two canes to come to church,
but he was there most Sundays.

His desire was simple and surprising.

"I want someone to get in that pulpit every Sunday
and challenge me to change according to the Gospel."

That's what Lent is about.

That's what this passage
that we have been memorizing and pondering this week is about.

We are challenged to be devout and just.

Devotion and justice are the aspirations
that arise from the image of God sown within us.

We are invited to grow into the fullness of that image,
seen most clearly for humans in the person of Jesus Christ.

As we mature into that image, we will flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ
by constantly changing, growing, and maturing according to the Gospel.

*And remember, the Holy Spirit forms in us the confidence
to flourish in our witness to the grace of Jesus Christ
in every dimension of our lives.*

Preached by the Rev. Dr. Brian Fraser
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