

Memorize & Ponder

**Brentwood Presbyterian Church
October 20, 2013**

The Real Corinthians

**1 Corinthians 1:4-9 & Ps 121
(324, 727, 778, 775)**

I think God is interested in our potential
more than our problems.

God is more concerned about how we can get things right
than in how we can get things wrong.

God's guidance for us is more focused on bringing heaven to earth
than on constantly correcting our errors.

That is an important principle in a flourishing Christian faith.
It helps us to see things differently
from much of the world around us.

It helps us be more focused on our potential rather than our problems,
opening up options and possibilities for improvement.

It helps us be more focused on what's going right rather than what's going wrong,
opening up the confidence to courageously follow Jesus, the Christ.

It helps us be more focused on how to be a blessing in the future
rather than get stuck in regretting our past failures.

In the academic fields of organizational and personal development,
this attitude and approach is known as
Appreciative Inquiry and Positive Psychology.
These disciplines pay particular attention
to what is going right and well,
to our strengths and opportunities.

I think that's at the heart of the faith to flourish
we encounter in Jesus, the Christ.

We are encountered by a power that draws out our potential for good.
We are encountered by a presence that invites us into a different future.
We are encountered by a love that empowers us to bless.

I also think that the church has too often,
in its long history of faith and folly,
been focused on sin and wrong
to the point of distorting and disfiguring this Gospel.

At its worst, the church thinks it has all the answers,
all the right ways of doing things,
all the laws and rules that must be followed.
It insists on conformity to its ways.
It gets stuck in its own illusions of grandeur
and its seemingly right ways that must be preserved.

That's precisely what Jesus came to challenge
during his mission and ministry on earth.
He challenged an interpretation of his Jewish faith
that had hardened into a religious system and institution
that insisted on conformity to what its leaders thought right.

That's precisely what Jesus changed when he encountered Paul
on the Damascus road.
He transformed Saul from a brutal enforcer for the religious tyrants
into a loving encourager of people's potential.
This is not an image of Paul we commonly hear,
but I think it is true.

Paul, to use his own words, is a 'treasure in earthen vessels,'
but there is a lot of treasure there to value,
as there is in all of us.

That's where God wants us to start.
That is where God wants us to focus.
That is where God works best with us.
We'll see more of why over the next few weeks.

This loving Paul comes through loud and clear
in our memory verses this morning.
We examined them in some depth on Friday evening
at Bible Study.

Here are the qualities of the Corinthian Christian community
that we heard Paul affirming:
their faith is solid and firm;
they have been enriched in every way by Jesus, the Christ;
they are strong in their testimony to Jesus as the Christ;
they have been granted every spiritual gift necessary;
they are active in being a blessing in Corinth;
they have the courage and fortitude to remain true to the end.

This is how God, speaking through Paul, sees these people.

We know, from the rest of the Corinthian correspondence,
that the Christians in this community
are not living into the full potential of their nature
as God's beloved children and friends.

Much is happening in their midst
that is distorting and disfiguring the Gospel –
bickering and conflict, disrespect and abuse,
and lax standards of personal behaviour.
How the Christian community acts within itself and in its community
is a powerful witness to the power of the Gospel.

That witness is being weakened and withering
because of the attitudes and actions of some within the church.
Paul calls them back to the potential God offers them in Christ.

To pick up on something we talked about a couple of weeks ago,
he calls them back to love, aspiration, and faith - to LAFter.
That may be a good way of remembering the core of Paul's faith.

He loves these people so much,
as brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus,
that he aspires openly and eloquently
to shape their faith in conformity to the example of Jesus, the Christ.
It's not a set of rules, or laws, or doctrines,
but a living relationship with the One who shows all of humanity their potential,
how they can live full and flourishing lives in companionship with God.

That's the spirit and intent behind the survey
the Session is inviting you to fill out
for our congregation consultation on Nov 3.
We want to find out how you are experiencing the LAFter of Brentwood –
what are we doing well that nourishes you in the grace of Jesus Christ,
what can we do better,
what ideas do you have for making those improvements –
all so we can witness better to the grace of Jesus Christ in our community?

Enrich us with the gifts of your insights,
both in your responses to the survey questions and in your conversation
at the congregational consultation on Nov 3 after lunch.

This is just one of the opportunities God is offering us
to become the Christians he has made us to be.

*May God fill you with LAFter this week,
with love, aspiration, and faith,
as you go forth to bless the world.*