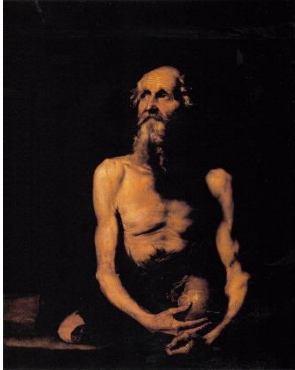


# Brian's Sermon Text at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, Apr 26, 2020



## Forgiven and Sanctified

(Ps 116 and Acts 26:1-23)

**I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles –  
To whom I am sending you to open their eyes that they may  
turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to  
God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a  
place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.  
(Acts 26:17-18)**

**Word to Ponder = Forgiven**

**Congregational Wisdom = received grace, love, understanding, release,  
absolution, relief, peace, new beginning, ongoing, empowerment, giving back**

As I was pondering this passage this week,  
my fascination was drawn to the ways in which the key actors  
were representing key communities.

Felix was the Roman governor of Judea,  
representing the community of the empire  
that is seeking an imposed peace  
through military and economic control.

Agrippa was the grandson of Herod the Great,  
who slaughtered the innocents in an attempt to eliminate Jesus.  
Agrippa himself is a close, and corrupt, confidant  
of the infamous Roman emperor Caligula.  
He defended successfully Jewish interests with Caligula.

Paul was a turncoat to the Jewish leaders of his day,  
many of whom would have worked closely with him  
In their attempts to eliminate the new Christian sect.  
He was a threat to the imposed peace of the empire  
because of the riots and unrest Christian colleagues were arousing  
in many of the cities where Christian communities were forming.

In the complex dynamics of empires and puppet kings,  
the alliance between Agrippa and Caligula  
was especially corrupt and nasty.

So, three ambassadors have been gathered,  
two representing the integrated religious and political powers the times,  
and one representing the fourth key actor,  
Jesus, the Creator's Christ,  
the first manifestation of a new humanity  
that would bless that Creator's world  
with forgiveness and sanctification,  
the mission to which humanity was created to contribute.

I hope those short sketches enable you to imagine  
A bit of the tension and drama in the audience hall.

Let's say a bit more about Paul at this stage  
in his service to the mission of Jesus Christ  
to fulfill God's promises to God's creation.

I've begun to read commentaries on Paul's Corinthian letters.  
I'd like to focus our next year of ponderings  
of the bible's witness to the living Word of God in Jesus Christ  
on those books in the Christian scriptures.  
In the introduction to the commentary on 1 Corinthians  
that William F Orr and James A Walther wrote,  
we find this summary of what Paul endured  
as an ambassador of the message of the Gospel,  
an ambassador of forgiveness and sanctification:

*Five times he was beaten with the thirty-nine stripes imposed by the Jews according to the law. From rabbinical sources we discover that the lashes were imposed by men who would leap off the ground when they delivered the blows. Many times the victims were left insensible, sometimes even killed when they were weak to begin with. Five such beatings during a career would be incredible suffering for anyone to endure. In addition to this, he was beaten by the Romans three times. On one occasion he was stoned, and three times he was shipwrecked; during one shipwreck he spent a day and a night in the water. All this occurred to Paul in addition to the anxieties and fears produced by dangerous conditions of travel and by threats from gentiles, his own people the Jews, rioting mobs, and false brothers within the Christian community. He was worn down by labour and distress, by sleepless nights, by hunger and thirst, and by freezing cold. Throughout it all, he carried the anxieties and care for all the churches, feeling full and personal responsibility for the weaknesses, dissensions, and scandals that might arise in them. (p.26)*

This is the ambassador Jesus Christ has chosen  
to represent the Gospel amidst the great pomp  
of this gathering of the military tribunes and the prominent people of the city.

Here's how I read Paul's defense.

*The attitudes and behaviours I am now nourishing to flourish  
are those intended for the blessing of the world by our God,  
the God of Abraham, Moses, David, and all the prophets.  
I didn't always think so,  
but our God forgave me and invited me into a deeply reconciled friendship.  
In that relationship, I am enabled  
to walk humbly in the sanctifying paths of divine love.  
I have been reconciled with our God by our God  
whose sanctifying light is seen most brightly in Jesus of Nazareth.  
Daily, I am composing myself with the forgiving and sanctifying gifts of the Holy Spirit –  
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity,  
faithfulness, and gentleness.*

Then, and we didn't read this far, but then Paul said to Agrippa,  
"Come and join us in this mission,  
as ambassadors of *this* message!  
That decision may not come quickly,  
but do give it some consideration!"

As Festus said, Paul must be out of his mind!  
Here he is in front of the most powerful representative  
of his accusers and persecutors,  
before the communities that have inflicted much of his suffering,  
inviting him to join the mission.  
Paul sees Agrippa, and every other person in that hall,  
as forgiven and enabled to live into the way of Jesus,  
to live into the sanctification that God desires for all humanity,  
to live into the redemption the Creator has offered to all humanity  
in Jesus, that God's Christ.

It's a life-changing defense.  
Agrippa died soon after this encounter, after only three years as king.  
We have no idea how he responded to Paul's invitation.  
It may very well have been working its wonders within him.  
Let's assume so.

And let's assume that same invitation, with all of its benefits,  
is at work among us and all those we encounter,  
assuring us of forgiveness and leading us into the sanctification  
of being blessings for God's creation.

## My Notes



## My Prayers

### This morning's Prayers of the People

Let us continue to pray together.

Compose with us, within us, and among us  
a resilience in the face of the challenges we face  
in these times of pandemic and violence.  
Infuse those who mourn with your comfort and peace.  
Inspire those who respond with determination and grace.  
Teach those who observe, from whatever distance,  
forgiveness and reconciliation.

The complexities of our living together  
exceed our abilities to understand.  
But you have revealed to us  
a seminal influence to take into every situation we enter.  
It is the influence of your love.  
Love for ourselves as your friends,  
love for our neighbours as beings created in your image,  
and love for you as the creative Energy that invites us into your flow of blessing.

Make us ever more deeply aware of this love  
in all of our circles of inspiration and influence.

And help us hear afresh the stirring sounds of *your* prayer: