

Brian's Sermon Text at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, May 10, 2020

Living in Gratitude for Courage

(Ps 31:14-24 and Acts 28:11-22)



And so we came to Rome. The believers from there, when they heard of us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage.
(Acts 28:14b-15)

Word to Ponder = Courage

Congregational Wisdom = action in spite of fear, mental strength, strength, bravery, confidence, conflict, heart, working through fear, selfless, engaging in something of value, optimistic, God is always with us

An intriguing fascination kept pestering me this week.
And the pestering got more persistent as the week unfolded.

Here's the question.
"What must Paul's mother have felt about her son's life?"

Where could that curiosity have originated,
other than from the Holy Spirit
in her mothering impishness.

Valiant as my intellect was in its efforts to ignore this question,
it would not go away.
So, it shapes my reflections this morning on this Mothers' Day.

Paul is at the end of his life.
Soon he will be executed
because of where his Lord had led him and had him doing.

What he has been doing,
just to reiterate what we have discovered
in our explorations of Acts over this past 12 months,
is being one of many ambassadors
for the message of the Gospel.
And that, in brief, is that the Creator
forgave and reconciled the world
to get it back on track to be God's delightful garden home.
God did that as a human being, Jesus of Nazareth,
in ways we would love to know, but that still befuddle us.
Somewhere deep in our souls, however,
the Holy Spirit convinces us this is true
and give us the courage to express that conviction
through our unique gifts.

I do wonder how much Paul's mother knew
about his trials and tribulations.
Let's assume, for this morning's speculations,
that he and his friends visited her in Tarsus from time to time.
Let's assume her loving curiosity drew from them
at least some of the stories about Paul's sufferings.
She would have known about his diseases.
She would have been deeply concerned
about the travails brought on by his dramatic conversion
to the message of this Jesus fellow.
Fervent about the faith in which she would have raised him,
he once persecuted this man's followers.
Now he was the subject of that persecution.
His life was constantly being threatened.
And with the slowness of news traveling in those days,
she might very well have imagined the worse.

And had the depth of Paul's transformation
convinced her to shift her loyalty
to this new way of understanding God's redemption of the world?
Let's assume that as well.

As you can imagine by now,
we could spend a delightful few hours
speculating about this mother
who, like so many other women,
has been excluded from our understanding of history.
But she did exist and she did love her son.

Now, let's jump from those speculations
to these last days of Paul in Rome.

What struck me when I first chose this passage,
and what continues to provoke me now,
is the role that community plays in Paul's courage.
That's the conviction I want to emphasize this morning.

Paul and the others included in Luke's "we"
arrive in the centre of imperial power
for yet another confrontation
with a different way of understanding how to live together.
The difference, in essence, is between Rome's peace and God's peace.
Friends in Christ come to welcome them
and they eat together in a tavern.
In those conversations, in that family gathering,
Paul is grateful and encouraged.
That's how God's forgiving and reconciling love is embodied.
It comes to bless us in friends
who make up this new family in Jesus Christ.

And, if our speculations are still permitted,
Paul's mother, even at a distance of 2600 kms,
even if she has passed on by this time,
is part of the inspiration and influence
that gives Paul the courage for his part in Jesus' mission.

For that rich meaning and purpose in his life, shaped by so many people
through whom the energy of God's love has blessed the world,
he is grateful.

May the same gratitude and courage fill us on this Mothers' Day.

My Notes



My Prayers

This morning's Prayers of the People

Take yet again these prayers that we have expressed
in word and thought and feeling
and shape them further in our souls
to align us with the intent of your forgiving and reconciling love.

You have given each of us,
In our unique circles of inspiration and influence,
opportunities to be channels of your peace.
In our families and networks of neighbours,
open our eyes to see those opportunities.
Open our ears to hear the cries of pain.
Open our minds to discern the most appropriate support.
Open our hearts to summon up the courage to persist.
Open our souls to your gift of gratitude that sustains us.

As we compose new normals
in the various interdependencies of our lives,
guide us and guard us with your mothering love.

Inspire us to sing more deeply into the truth
of the prayer your apostles have passed down to us:

[we sing Darryl Nixon's arrangement of *The Lord's Prayer*]