

Brian's Sermon Text for Sunday Worshiping at Brentwood

Sunday, July 26, 2020

The Life the Lord Assigns

(Psalm 119:129-136 and 1 Corinthians 7:17-24)



However it may be, let each of you
lead the life that the Lord has
assigned, to which God has called you.
This is my rule in all the churches.
(1 Cor 7:17)

Word to Ponder = Assignment

Congregational Wisdom = wherever we find ourselves there, karma & grace, Spirit at work, responsibility, don't like it, non-standard operations in foreign theatres (military reference), creation evolving, be present, cruciform, task, focus, project, something much bigger, do good trouble, mission, live by the commandments, covenant duty, God's call

Let's remind ourselves
of what's really going on in this correspondence
between Paul and whoever reads and hears these words
in the various factions of the church in Corinth.
We've only got a portion of the conversation, really.
It's clear from what we have that letters have been exchanged,
conversations have been had,
and ways of moving forward beyond the impasses
have been imagined.

But this is a work in progress,
initiated by the risen Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit,
and carried out in conversation by the whole community.

What's been going on in Corinth,
much to Paul's distress,
is that individuals claiming to know
what the risen Christ really wants
have been imposing their views on the community,
making them divided communities.
These tyrannical leaders claim their views
are the Word of the Lord to be followed without question.
They deny the people authentic participation
that would lead to true responsibility.

I have to admit that I saw Paul in those terms for a long time.
And I think many in successive generations in the church
read him the same way.
Paul's word is the Word of God.
End of discussion!

But Charles Campbell, who teaches preaching at Duke,
has a different view of the discipling dynamics in these conversations
among Paul and his colleagues in Christ in Corinth.
In his commentary on 1 Corinthians in the new Belief series,
this is his provocative suggestion about how to best understand
what's happening as the new worshiping community
forms, storms, norms, and performs
its missioning in Christ.

Paul's guidance is not authoritarian here – not the Word of the Lord – but one voice among all those who also exercise spiritual discernment. Paul models a communal, dialogical, practical theology. Even in all their conflicts and disagreements, the members of the Corinthian church are invited into the Spirit-driven process of discernment. Similarly, the contemporary Christian community is invited to hear Paul's words, not as the Word of the Lord but simply as one voice in the larger process of continued communal discernment. (Charles L Campbell, 1 Corinthians, pp. 2544-46 in Kindle edition)

I think this spirit of dialogical discernment
of the lives the Lord assigns to us,
over against monological messaging of what you must do,
is consistent with the introduction Paul wrote to these letters.

Remember, he recognized all of these contentious Christians in Corinth as sanctified and enriched in speech and knowledge.

God is working among them all in true faithfulness to reform them all into the ambassadors of forgiveness and reconciliation he has assigned and enabled them to be in Christ.

This new way of living together has interrupted to old ways and is working its wonders and wisdom out in their midst.

It's not complete, but it is in process.

That's still the case among us.

The life the Lord assigns to his community, this Body of Christ missioning in God's world for God's purposes, is still a witness, however imperfect, to the restored kin-dom that God inaugurated in Jesus, the Creator's Christ.

So, what is the life the Lord assigns in the light of these considerations?

Let's highlight three things in conclusion.

First, it's a life of participation in and responsibility for God's missioning.

This is accepted most faithfully, wisely, and effectively in a community of discerners where every voice is valued.

I wonder what kinds of reformulations of our faith would emerge if we re-read all of Paul's letters with that intention in our souls?

Second, it's a life that is open to the continuing illumination of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit generates wisdom in and through the community's conversations.

Sermons like this are only part of those conversations.

Questions like Kayden and Ben and now others are asking

in our 'Curious about Church' podcasts,

in our 'Praying with Brentwood' gatherings,

in our dialogue with the jazz community,

and in our conversations with each other during the week,

are all being composed by the Spirit

into a witness to the Creator's forgiveness and reconciliation in Christ.

Third, it's a life of humble confidence.

The more I reflect on Paul's writings, the more I find that wisdom in him.

There is a deep confidence in God's intent for creation

accompanied by a deep humility in Paul's understanding of his faith.
It is still being formed and reformed
in this fellowship of the friends of Jesus.

My prayer is that Brentwood becomes ever more faithfully
a place and space where we can discern together
the life that the Lord assigns.

We can't do that without your voice,
wherever that voice may be coming from at this point in your life.

Know it is welcomed here at Brentwood
as part of our dialogical discerning of the life the Lord
is assigning to this community of his beloved humans.

My Notes



My Prayers

Prayers of the People

[spoken or written into the service]

In the midst of all of our celebrations and concerns, dear Lord,
those spoken and those quietly remembered in our souls,
strengthen in us the courage to be in dialogue
with you, with others, and with our authentic selves.

Enable those conversations to provoke love and good works
that spread the inspiration and influence
of your forgiveness and reconciliation.

And listen as we sing again with humble confidence
of the trust and loyalty invited in your prayer: