

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Head, Heart and Spirit"
Dr. J. Dent

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Third Sunday after Epiphany

Each of us looks into the mirror everyday. If you don't, tell me at the door. Sometimes what we see surprises us. Sometimes it does not. A mirror is a tool to aid self-perception. Self-perception is even harder than figuring out what to do with our hair, our skin, our clothes and the other parts of us that we try and figure out.

We are our bodies. Science tells us there is no existence we currently understand apart from our bodily existence even though the Scripture tells us there is more to this life than simply our bodily existence. For some, this is difficult to accept. For others, nothing could be easier to understand.

Parts of our bodies throughout history have become metaphors for parts of our human existence and experience. The head has become the metaphor for thinking and the most recognizable part of the body. The heart has become the metaphor for feeling, even though some neuroscientists would locate loving or feeling in the limbic system. Some of us tend to think of the heart as only a pump but it is more than that. And the guts are sometimes where we say we sense something deep inside. But the human spirit is even more difficult to define because it encapsulates the essence of who we are without any physical part of the body to which we can relate it.

These three parts, head, heart and spirit metaphorically are descriptive of self-perception in a way that would help us understand who we are, at least parts of who we are. So we can describe ourselves as people who think, who rationally process ideas and look for meaning. We can also describe ourselves as people who feel, that is, who rationally value experiences and relationships.

Some who are strong in thinking, in analysis, in summarizing complex ideas and situations, may be weak in their feeling abilities. They may be wonderful in understanding the daily news, but terrible at understanding their spouse or what's happening inside them in their own issues and attitudes. And of course the reverse is often true as well, that those who are amazing and sensitive in human relations may not be outstanding in math and science. There are exceptional people who seem to be well rounded, but

generally my experience has been that we all have strengths; and corresponding to those strengths are weaknesses in opposite fields. I've said for a long time that to achieve a PhD in one field certainly shows a level of intelligence and competence, but says very little about one's social skills or consciousness of the feelings of others and one's own. In fact, extraordinary ability in one area of life often is at the expense of disability in another.

We come together into this place and we need one another because we have gifts that differ. We are different one from the other, and that's good.

In Rome and Corinth, when the Christians came together through the apostle Paul and others, there was a kind of spiritual judgment that was going on based on lifestyle. How you ate, what you ate; how you celebrated holidays, what holidays you celebrated; whether you drank alcohol or whether you chose not to do so; all these things were dividing the new church. And Paul had to write them and try to help them.

He urged the new Christians, in Romans 14 and in 1 Corinthians 8, to no longer judge one another because of their diet, their holidays and their choice to drink or not. Because the Jewish Christians looked down at the former pagans who would eat the meat sacrificed to idols in the marketplace; and similarly would scorn those same pagans for celebrating the cultural holidays which revolved around the pagan gods, some of which our daily days are named today. And finally there was a lot of finger pointing around alcohol, which may be pretty much the same today.

The former pagans, on the other hand, would call their Jewish Christian brothers and sisters "legalists" and killjoys. Paul tried to cut through these difficult multicultural waters by saying it was more important to care for one another, than our diets. It is more important to celebrate one another and relationship to one another because of what Jesus has done for us and made us into a family, than what exact days you take off, and holidays you choose to celebrate. And apart from Paul's teaching that drinking too much is not good for you, because you become a slave to drink, and cannot serve God when you are enslaved to that, he pretty much said it is okay to choose to drink or to choose not to drink. It's your choice. Just don't speak against your Christian neighbor who chooses a different practice.

Don't offer an alcoholic a glass of wine with their dinner. Don't ask a vegetarian how well cooked they would like their steak. But more than that,

honour and respect the Christian who is trying to honour and respect the Lord with their lifestyle.

There are many of you who know so much more than others in certain fields of study. This is good. This is your livelihood. But don't think you are better than others. Sometimes, Paul says, our knowledge will increase our pride, but not our caring for others. Seek to excel, therefore, in loving others, in respecting them and encouraging them more than trying to educate them or tell them they don't know enough. We are learning together as we relate to one another through our mutual relationship to God. Being known by God is better than knowing lots.

This is not just a thinly veiled anti-intellectualism. This is a prioritizing and blending of the various cultural and sub-cultural groups within the body of Christ. You know how you can win an argument and lose a friend. It is important to contextualize our learning and our desire to learn within a framework of caring for others first.

Jesus balanced the head and the heart better than anyone. This is one of the main reasons people were astounded at his teaching: simple, yet profound. His authority was not just in his ability to quote scholars, nor in his rhetorical skills. He was not just a great speaker. He carried the presence of the Holy Spirit with him, in him. He was able to confront the unclean spirits, the evil that was manifesting in some of the people he met. They wanted to destroy him and what he was doing but wound up asking him to not confront them or be destroyed themselves.

There is such a thing as a murderous, lie-loving, hate mongering, enjoying the pain of others type of spirit, that seems to hang on to some people. Jesus was as able to confront these as easily as talking about the Bible, or about gardening. The human spirit is the part of us that is the essence of who we are, and the part that comes into fellowship with God once we say "yes" to Jesus as Lord and Saviour. The human spirit without that fellowship can be led astray a long ways and severely influenced by evil.

We regularly encourage you to give yourself to God in Jesus. Jesus can quiet those parts of us that are in rebellion to Him, and can bring peace to those parts that are deeply disturbed. It is our desire, my desire, to see you experience the peace of God, to be influence in your thinking for Jesus, to

know that God cares about how you feel, and that your feeling, your valuing systems are deeply transformed by the One who created life itself.

We need each other. We need to encourage one another to follow this One who brings a new teaching into our lives with authority. His authority is as the Author of Life. He puts the **super** in Super Sunday.

Let us trust him together. Let us pray.