

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Crisis, Need, ...More"
Dr. J. Dent

July 26, 2015
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
Holy Baptism

One of the regular themes we see in Scripture and in our own lives is the ways in which God draws us to Himself. God is not often using the means or plans we might choose. It is often the crises of our lives, the neediness we experience and the places where we are unable to change ourselves. These dark places become the places where God shows himself real and true. And it is certainly through other people who have experienced the depth of the love of God and have known themselves to be profoundly changed; here we see God at work.

In the parable of the prodigal sons, we see the one who goes away from home and rebels in a strong way until he goes hungry and comes to his senses. The older son stays at home and yet does not know the love of the father, nor his own neediness until confronted by how the father treats his brother. He too was a prodigal, although he stayed home.

We encounter God in many different ways, some of us never knowing any different way from when we were young. Some of us wandering away from God but finding the way back. Some of us dramatically changed by God, and know how much of difference God has made in our lives.

David was so close to God. He was chosen as a youngster to be king, but waited several years before becoming that person. He was a worship leader, a shepherd, a warrior, a courageous man, a hunted man and a victorious king. But he had weaknesses, as do we all. He should have been with his army at war, but was at home, looking and finding trouble. He should have admitted his sexual sin, but instead compounded his adultery by murdering one of his famous fighters, under his command. He had to be confronted by the prophet Nathan, and when he was confronted, he submitted to God.

We too need to admit our sexual sin and find help before it gets compounded. We too need to acknowledge the relational and emotional issues that lead to this kind of sin. It is difficult to find the safe places to share in our lives at this level of need. We will attempt to have at least one small group here in the church where you can share at your level of need. Talk to us and tell us your need. There are some groups currently scheduled

to begin in the Fall, but we can begin new ones, as you express what you need. And we will offer at least one new course to help you, without your expressing your need.

The key is not only sharing what our need is, but asking for help in the appropriate places. There are many hidden sins besides the sexual ones. There are the substance addictions, alcohol and drugs, food addictions, where we cannot stop eating something we know we should be eating either in the quantity or in the quality in terms of our health, emotional addictions of co-dependence where we expect others to handle our problems, or worse, expect that we can control others' decisions, when we cannot. There are porn and video addictions, where we lose hours to games or TV, without noticing the hours flying by. Everyone has something in their lives that helps them cope with the frustrations and powerlessness that we often experience but find difficult to admit. It much easier to deny whatever the painful reality is of our lives and carry on in these other ways.

Some in our culture go so far as saying there is no God (Psalm 14). These foolish ones choose to believe that God is a psychological construct, or just another way to avoid cosmic dumb luck that life exists here on earth, and that we have not destroyed ourselves. Sometimes some of us wonder and doubt in this way. If you do, don't deny it, but bring it back to God.

We know and long for this Jesus who ministered on the earth so long ago now. He knew when the crowd was hungry. He knows when we are hungry, angry, lonely or tired. He knows when we are this way, we need to HALT or stop what we might decide in these states of mind. Just as he fed the crowd supernaturally, he can feed us. He feeds the crowd with a boy's lunch of bread and fish. He multiplies the food and all know the relief from hunger that Jesus can bring. If you are spiritually hungry today, and don't know where to turn, turn to Jesus, the bread of life. We offer him ourselves, and our children, just as Emma and David have offered Benjamin this morning.

John the Gospel writer warns us not to turn to Jesus just for the miracles he can do in your life. He can do that. But John notes that the crowd wanted to make him king because he could perform the miracle of food multiplication. He went away from them when they were going to insist on a political solution to a spiritual challenge, that is, making him king, but not the kind of king he was called to become.

And later in the same passage in John 6, we find Jesus defying physics and walking across the water to the disciples' boat. He comes and not only walks on water but calms the storm. Now we know the storms of our own lives and how dangerous they can be. Here in Newfoundland, we know the wind can be enough to knock you over here, if you think you can face it, no matter what the weather. Be careful to think you will not fall, no matter what the storm is like. For here we need the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ to calm the storms of our lives. It is good to simply acknowledge now in your minds where God has calmed the storm in your lives in the past, and give Him thanks. It is also good to look forward to what He might do to calm the storm in your life that you are facing now. What might that be? If you are not sure you are facing a storm, ask a trusted friend or family member, what storm do you think I am going through now, and listen keenly for their insight.

We know the Lord can calm the storm. Sometimes we simply need to identify it, and invite him into the storm...relational, emotional, sexual, health issues, life decisions, a family member going astray, our own bad choices catching up with us, you name it.

Here is the place where God can do more than we can ask or imagine. It is in the stormy parts of our lives. It is good to be grateful in the normal routine of our lives, for the flowers, the gardens, the pets, the family, co-workers, friends, beloved recreation, loved work, clean air, powerful vistas, whatever comes into your path, or in your mind, it is good to say thanks.

But even more it is imperative for us to invite God into those parts of our lives that we keep hidden, that we keep trying to change, but cannot. Here is where God shows his strength in our lives, where the love of Christ is made plain and clear. These are the words that Paul uses in Ephesians 3. God's love fills us up. The hymn writer says the love of God could never be fully expressed even if we all had a pen and paper to write our whole lives, there would not be enough ink. It goes like this:

The love of God is greater far
Than tongue or pen can ever tell;
It goes beyond the highest star,
And reaches to the lowest hell;
The guilty pair, bowed down with care,

God gave His Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled,
And pardoned from his sin.

Refrain:

Oh, love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure—
The saints' and angels' song.

When hoary time shall pass away,
And earthly thrones and kingdoms fall,
When men who here refuse to pray,
On rocks and hills and mountains call,
God's love so sure, shall still endure,
All measureless and strong;
Redeeming grace to Adam's race—
The saints' and angels' song.

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.

Words by Frederick Martin Lehman/ Meir Ben Isaac Nehorai
CCLI#3032598 Used by permission.

We need to experience this kind of love as never before. I need God's love freshly poured into my life and I trust you need the same. Let us become those people who are safe enough to hear one another's weaknesses and sins and offer them to God as a place of God's transformation.

Let us pray.