

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Talk to your Doctor about it"
Dr. J. Dent

October 25, 2015
Reformation Sunday

When something goes wrong with your health, most people will tell you to talk to your Doctor about it. And this is not only true for your physical health but also for your spiritual health. Jesus was quite blunt in his day to those religious leaders and others who fancied themselves righteous, self-righteous or simply, in no need of anyone's help. Not being able to receive help and intervention from others is a grave spiritual illness. That's why Jesus says, "Only the sick need a doctor." (which is in all the gospels, but especially Mark 2:17) He was telling us that we need to be open with God about our spiritual condition, unlike many who consider themselves fine as they are. Only those who consider themselves sick need a doctor. Now today we also go to the doctor for preventive and regular maintenance, treating ourselves, I trust you do, treating ourselves at least as well as we treat our cars or other machines.

We go to the Doctor and talk to him/her so that we might get well, and certainly receive counsel that we could not give to ourselves. And this is the same reason we go to God, because God has a perspective on our lives that we cannot give ourselves. God gives us his revelation of life, of living a blessed life, a happy, peaceful life, a truthful life. And God gives us space to choose to invest in this revelation of His, or not.

Not only do we go individually to God for God's revelation for our lives, but we also go as a church. We ask the Lord for direction and entrust our church back to God for God's way in an increasingly godless society and culture.

Of course the Church has not always agreed internally, across all its branches over the face of the earth. In the NT, the apostle Paul tried to bring the Church together, the Jewish and Gentile Christians together from their various backgrounds, and in the end, a Committee of the apostles and the elders decided that the main problems were with disagreements over diet, i.e. eating meat that had been butchered with pagan rituals, eating blood, and practicing sexual immorality. So the apostles urged all believers to refrain from these three things. You know that some would not agree with this, and would leave the church or set up their own that would include these practices.

A thousand years later in church history, the Eastern patriarch proceeded to pull back from the Western church when his congregations in Italy were being forced to close. A western cardinal excommunicated him in 1053/4 and he excommunicated the cardinal. Church splits and disagreements go back a long way. Let us not think that this is merely something that has happened in the last hundred years or so. And there have been attempts in the 20th century to reverse the East/West split and bring many denominations together in a variety of ways, but thus far, they have not succeeded.

The Reformation was at first an attempt to reform the Roman Catholic Church from within. It was a priest and other church leaders, who tried to reason with the international church leaders. But that did not work, and eventually for Luther in Germany, Calvin in France and Switzerland, and Knox in Scotland, new church movements began to put forward the essentials of the faith in the great rallying cries of faith alone, Scripture alone, grace alone. These were movements that tried to bring believers back to the Bible as the revelation from God and Jesus the Word of God. We celebrate Luther's nailing his 95 theses to the door at Wittenburg, not as an act of church division, or as an act of rebellion, but his attempt to get the Church back on track with the Scripture and the Lord. He spoke against the practice of selling indulgences, which is something like buying salvation, and spoke for the study of Scripture and the reading of Scripture for everyone, not just priests. This placing of many propositions on the church door was a way to foster public debate and to teach the people, on Oct. 31, 1517. We still try to encourage you 500 years later, to get know Jesus through the Bible, and to live your life as a follower of his.

Job essentially did this, repented of his attitude of entitlement before the Lord, as we read in chapter 42, the last chapter of the book of Job. He entrusted his life anew to the Lord, and God was gracious to give him more family, more possessions and a higher status in life than he had ever had before. Of course there is no guarantee of such a reversal of fortunes in our own life, yet we are still called to trust God in the midst of our losses.

And the blind man named Bartimaeus, in Mark 10, also called out to the Lord. He gave his life to Jesus for healing and for fulfillment. We too need to cry out to God, as we cannot see our lives from God's perspective without the help of his Holy Spirit who He gives to us all who trust Jesus. But with God's perspective, we can experience healing and hope anew today.

Many of us struggle with finding hope in the midst of our losses. These can be very significant losses, and they can be also the loss of a dream with the Blue Jay loss, or if you were hoping a different party would have formed the government of Canada. Nevertheless, we bring our dashed hopes, personal ones, political ones, spiritual ones, emotional ones, to the Lord. All we can do is be honest with the state of our hearts. As we are honest, we can get help.

For instance, I am attending a small group in another church which is offering a Christian Anger Management course. I don't consider my anger to be out of control, but I do have problems with anger. And my father did before me. So as I admit I need help, I go for help and God provides. I know this is a simple model, but perhaps you too need help in this area. As I get help, I would be pleased to offer here what I have learned, and trust that God will help you as He is helping me.

Maybe there is another need in your life, and anger is not your problem. We want to be able to offer here several groups and courses that would address that need. I am also hoping to offer a group on holistic health, emotional, sexual, spiritual wholeness. If you are interested in that, I would love to know.

And the PCC, the Presbyterian Church in Canada is supposed to come out with its sexuality study before next Sunday. I am told it is at least 75 pages long and not surprisingly has hit some controversy and disagreement bumps in the road to producing it. Apparently, the Life and Mission Agency Justice Ministries group has been happy with it, and the Church Doctrine Committee has not been happy with it, to date. So I am not sure what will happen this week, if there is disagreement over the document. Of course, it was a tall order to address the subject of LGBTQ persons in marriage, church leadership and sexual ethics, is a huge and difficult task for any one committee to address, let alone two diverse committees, particularly given a time frame of sixteen weeks, half of those in the Summer. Once the study comes out, we will be scheduling time to look at it in several venues in the church, at Session, in the congregation, in Presbytery and in Synod Council.

We had a great speaker at our Synod meetings this last week. I'll share just one thing that he got us to think about: he suggested that we begin to change our administrative structures to put prayerful discernment in and throughout

them, so that we do not use the business model, or parliamentary model, which always has winners and losers based on power or majority. Instead, he suggests the Session (the Elders' meeting) be run more like a worship service, where we listen to God in the beginning, but also throughout the decision making process, and where there is any divergent voice or concern, we stop to pray, and see if God can address that concern. Rev. Dr. Graham Standish, our Synod speaker, shared that God has creatively helped his PCUSA church outside Pittsburg, PA, to get through difficult issues, by turning to God in quietness and prayer, rather than simply having prolonged debates. I will be talking to the Elders and others, to try and implement this sensible and spiritual course of discernment.

We all need to be listening to the Lord in these days. What that looks like may reflect Job and formerly blind Bartimaeus. We need to help each other by praying with each other in these days.

Let us pray.