

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"Keeping What You Give Away"  
Dr. J. Dent

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Presbyterians Sharing Sunday/  
Contemporary Sunday

What lasts in this life and beyond? I was struck again by this "more than a legacy" question when we were in Ottawa in August. We were visiting our friends who live in the upper part of a 20 some story apartment/condo building near the Ottawa River. You could see the whole vista of the River, downtown and also the buildings across the river in Quebec. I noted a large cluster of buildings there and asked our hosts what buildings those were. Oh, he said, those are the former campus of Northern Telecom (Nortel). Remember that company? It was a tech giant with tens of thousands of employees that no longer exists. The buildings still do. This then made me think of another company. I used to work in a camera store in California. If I asked you who was the best know manufacturer of camera film, who would you guess that would be? If you guessed Kodak, you would be right. Now do you know who invented the digital camera, or the core technology in it? If you guessed Kodak, you would be right again. They developed what in part put them out of business. Now back in the '70s and '80s, I wouldn't believe you if you told me Kodak was going out of business. Now history has spoken and it is no more. These companies' legacies are clear for anyone to see. Someone this week told me they believe the same will happen to Apple. We'll see.

The clearest picture of life is that we all one day be history. No matter if that event comes sooner or later, we will all be history some day. There's no probability calculation in that. It is a certainty. So how will you be remembered. What legacy will you leave? What will be said about you at your funeral? More importantly, what will God say about you? Our personal legacies can have the effect of focusing our lives and minds for a few moments.

Here's where we apply the biblical principle of "you get to keep what you give away." Now this is not a universal principle. In another words, if you give away anger or abuse or rebellion against God, you don't get to keep that. If you give away the good things of your life, you get to keep them; but if you hold onto them, you lose them. By the way, Jesus says this applies up to and including your own life: give it away to Jesus today.

The Proverbs 31 woman gave away her life to the Lord, that's why she was praised, more than her career, her businesses, her devotion to her husband and her family and her successes. It was her giving herself to God. That was last week. This week we see beautiful Esther giving up her life, and interceding for the Jewish people who Haman wants to destroy. In chapter 5 of the book, that we did not read, we find out she is willing to risk going unannounced into the king's presence, hope he will hold out the royal scepter to her, granting her an audience with the king, and had this not been done, she would have risked the death penalty for arriving uninvited in his presence. She risked her life to intercede for her people and she was scared to do so. But had she not given away her life in this way, she and her whole people might have lost their lives in Haman's plan. Instead it turned out the other around and Haman and his family lost their lives even as they were planning the genocide. And Purim is celebrated still today in the Jewish calendar in late winter/early spring.

James speaks about giving away our faith in James chapter 5 by praying for healing. Of course a prayer for healing presumes a request for healing, and a request for healing presumes a person acknowledging their need and their lack. The person praying for healing, an elder, in our tradition, a teaching or ruling elder, risks praying and anointing with oil not because they know the outcome in advance, but because they are giving up the control of the situation to God, and simply asking for mercy. Medicine presumes scientific repeatable results. Praying for healing simply acknowledges our lack, and opens ourselves to the Great Physician.

James prescribes confessing our sins to one another for the purpose of forgiveness, healing and reconciliation. Whether this be done on a nation to nation level, with the first nations, or a person to person level, the results depend upon the grace and the courage of the sharing, and the grace and the courage of the ones praying for the one who has shared.

Jesus has the strongest of words for us in Mark chapter 9. His disciples, led by John, tell him they tried to stop someone else from performing an exorcism in Jesus' name because they didn't know who he was. Jesus surprises them by telling them that those who aren't against us are for us. He asks his disciples to give up control of others who claim to do things in his name. Jesus affirms social action in affirming the giving of a cup of cold water. Jesus affirms caring for children, even at such a young age, and giving them up to the Lord. This is clearly what Kim and Craig have done

today. They have given Kaylée up to the Lord, in baptism. Now it is all parents' duty and everyone else's duty to not turn their children away from God, to not turn them away from Jesus. Turning children away from Jesus is a serious breach of what God wants. As you make your life choices, keep this in mind.

And Jesus doesn't stop there. He says even more controversial things (for his day and culture, where women and children were possessions). He says you have to give up yourself to the Lord, and all the parts of who you are. He specifically talks about your hands, your feet and your eyes. He finishes with fire and salt.

Remember you only get to keep what you give away. Jesus is not literal in cutting off hands, feet and eyes. For we would all be surgeons, and few of us who are honest with ourselves would have hands or feet or eyes left to do or to go or to see. Surely Jesus is commanding us to give up our rights to do only what we want to do, rather than what Jesus wants us to do; our hands, to go only where we want to go, rather than where Jesus wants us to do go; our feet, and see only what we want to see, rather than what Jesus wants us to see. Our vision must be from the Lord, our actions and our choices must be tempered and directed by the Lord. So we worship everyday, by saying to God, what would you like me to do today, Lord? Where are we going today, Lord? Show me your vision for today, Lord. Engage your life with these prayers and you will be giving your life away and receiving it back again.

The irony of only keeping what you give away is that when you give your life away to the Lord, he gives back to you a brand new you, infused with himself. You may not see that right away, but you will as you walk the path. The irony of giving our children back to the Lord is that they are more ours and closer to us than ever before.

Jesus warns us of the fire of loneliness that burns and does not go away, where we reject the Lord in spite of what we know. That lonely place is a hellish place, that culminates in hell itself, a real self chosen prison that God allows because some really do not want to be with God. Jesus warns us of losing our saltiness which simply means being the salt in a rotting world, preserving the food, the meat of this life until the next. We are supposed to be the flavor and preservative of this world.

And one of our key character traits is supposed to be generosity. As we give away to our national church, we show that we can care about the Church beyond ourselves. Sure, we could keep thousands of dollars and only spend them locally, but then we would have no national organization if everyone chose that same keeping what is ours, rather than the giving away as we do, and we do it well.

If you choose to keep what you have, you will lose it. This is true in earthly possessions. Someone else will go through your stuff in the end. This is true for your spiritual gifts and other gifts that you have to give away during this lifetime. This is true for your money and finances. The Lord loves a cheerful giver. We could tell you that you owe God ten percent as a tax. But God prefers to tell you that in gratitude, you can offer back that tithe and more, as you see the truth of your keeping what you give, and losing what you keep. There is no logical sense in having more because you have given away, because mathematically it is less. But usually in this context less is more. I can tell you God has been faithful to me and my family over thirty years, as we have trusted God with a single income, and that income provided by faithful givers such as you, in congregations such as this. Thank you. It feels like a miracle. And I am grateful.

Be sure to trust God in this giving away, of yourself, your money, your time, your relationships, your family, your ideology, your vote, your ... you fill in the blank. Trust God for your givings today.

Let us pray.