

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Sharing"
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Presbyterians Sharing Sunday

Disasters tend to focus your mind. Disasters help us ask the question of ourselves and others: What really is important? When we lived in the Okanagan Valley in Armstrong, BC, it was the forest fires of 2003 that did this for us. We were on one hour evacuation alert that summer. It happened to be on a Sunday morning, which a few more people than I expected in church for worship. And no, I didn't preach on hell and the fire to come, although maybe I should have. But I did have the church books in the car, and the camping supplies and a couple of boxes of photographs in the van. These were ready to go in case we had to leave and expect that the house and the church would burn behind us.

This does tend to focus your mind. This last week, I was in the van at the corner of Columbus and Pennywell Roads and thought it was about to tip over. The traffic light had already cracked off, and power was out across much of the city. Large trees had fallen. And I am sure you have your own story of what happened to you. As I came home, I notice one of our neighbor's siding was stripping off and the insulation below it. Some of the siding was flying down to our house about a half a block away. I knew this was going to be a stronger wind than the often strong wind we experience here.

We were looking out the back window of our house and began to see the fence sway. The gusts had worked the nails loose in some of the eight foot sections of our fence. Then the one 4 x 4 post cracked off and two eight foot sections of fence fell to the ground. The same happen to three eight foot sections on the rear of the property. I had tried to bolster the fence sections with 2 x 6 and with a steel rod I have for digging rocks out of the ground. Both items did not help. And our story is nothing like those who saw the waters rise or destroy their road, home, property and similarly the winds. Some still are cut off, some still without provisions, power and the basic needs of life.

After Igor moved away, we began to hear stories of how Newfoundlanders helped each other. Take, for instance, the owner of the co-op in Clarenville getting supplies and a long liner for a run to Random Island. He did this

several times, bringing fresh milk and eggs and other supplies to a place where they had nothing or very little.

People's generosity comes to the fore when others need help. This also happened here in 2001, with all the stranded passengers from all the diverted aircraft. People shared what they could. And it was this simple sharing that changed lives. As you know, many scholarships and lifelong friends were developed and came about as the result of the tragedy nine years ago. I believe it is also happening now, this week, here in St. John's, and across the island.

This is not to say that the dark side of people was not also still at work. On that same Random Island in Hickman's Harbour, which we visited the summer before last, there was someone who broke into the gas and convenience store there and stole a bunch of cigarettes and alcohol. So not everyone was helping each other. The owner of that store was interviewed on CBC radio and he sounded quite deflated, like all the wind had gone out of his sails. In a time, when he was trying to help others, this happened to him.

And so we come to the choices facing us again this week. Like any time of the year, we need to choose between sharing and giving and taking. Our generosity comes out of who we are in the moment. Paul talks about this in the final chapter of his first letter to Timothy. Timothy was the young pastor that Paul was mentoring. In the last part of that letter, he warns young Timothy to realize that some are trying simply to make money out of religion and spirituality. They think godliness is a means to financial gain. Godliness here means "relationship with God," "reflecting God's character and concerns," and having a lifestyle that shows the love of God. And it is true that there is much gain in turning one's life over to God, in reflecting God's values of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. But such gain is not monetary gain, in fact it will cost you, if you take these character traits seriously. The true gain is an inward and spiritual gain.

That's why Paul talks about contentment, being thankful for what we do have. And it is interesting that the major response to the disaster across the island this week was "Being truly thankful for what we do have, and the fact that it could have been worse."

Paul reminds us that we brought nothing into this world, even if our parents were rich, and we can bring nothing out of it. So now we have a choice to be generous or not, helpful or not, caring or not. Paul warned Timothy to not care too much for money, but to be happy just with the clothes and food that you have. He also encouraged him to warn others who might think that money and finances and power of many kinds are the answer to life's questions and challenges, that these are not the answer. Many lottery winners and others who for whatever reason have placed their hope in their financial health "have fallen into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction." (1 Timothy 6:9b) And note that it is not money that does this, but the love of money which is a root of many kinds of evil.

Paul ends his letter to Timothy with a strong message of commanding his listeners who are well off to share what they have, to not put their hope in their wealth, but in God, to be rich in good deeds and generous and willing to share. This way, Paul says, they will be investing in the future, the future with God in the next life which is a much better investment than any kind of investment here. Paul says, as I perhaps say too often, that you only get to keep what you give away.

Sharing and generosity are hallmarks of following Jesus. It was Jesus himself who told the story of the poor man Lazarus who was begging out side rich man's property. Note that the poor man has a name, but the rich one does not. The poor man also had poor health care. In fact, the rich man's dogs seem to be healthier than Lazarus. But eventually both die. Lazarus and the rich man go to their rewards, the rich man who had lots but apparently had not cared about God or other people, and Lazarus who had given himself to God and died with nothing but his name. Lazarus was in heaven and the rich man was in hell and there was a moment in time after this life where they could see each other, at least, the rich man could see Lazarus.

Abraham does have the ability to see both sides and to communicate with the rich man. The rich man is pleading, first for himself (for a moment of relief) and then for his five brothers. Abraham calmly explains that the chasm between the two places cannot be breached and that there was no relief for the man who had only relief in the first life, while there was relief for the suffering man in the first life. This reversal of roles in the life to come ends the debate. But then the rich man says to Abraham, "perhaps you

could send a messenger back from the dead to warn my five brothers” who apparently are conducting themselves in the same manner that caused the rich man to wind up in hell. But Abraham wisely responds that the brothers already have the Scriptures, Moses and the prophets to warn them. To this the rich man replies that they won't read that stuff, but a person coming back from the dead will grab their attention. Sadly, Abraham tells them that if they won't listen to the Scriptures, they certainly won't listen to a person who rises from the dead, which is really a prophesy about how people will respond to Jesus, some will say “yes” to him and others will say “No.”

To each of us, we are challenged once again to know how we can help others: those we see on the street, those we know in our own families, those in our church communities, those God puts in our paths (which I believe is God's definition of “neighbour”).

On Presbyterians Sharing Sunday, we note that we give about twenty thousand dollars to the larger church, which helps fund, for example, the missionaries in Malawi who were here last week, Linda and Glenn Inglis. It also keeps our national office open, gives money to plant churches, for other missionaries, for theological education and a number of other projects which are outlined in the brochure in your bulletin today.

Generosity is the national Moderator's theme for the year. It is certainly a central theme in Scripture. We need to ask the Lord, how can we give, both from our regular income and in our wills, which is increasingly a huge support to the church, locally and nationally and internationally. If you want more information on this, please talk to me or directly to the national church by email or toll free phone number which you can get by calling our church office or me.

Thanks for the generosity which you currently show. Thanks for reflecting on how you might give of yourselves and your resources beyond what you have given in the past. And thanks for giving to make our denomination and tradition one of caring not just about ourselves, but others in the tradition of sharing and giving.

Let us pray.