

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
Dr. Jonathan Dent  
*Patience toward Family Members*

January 16, 2011  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany  
Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

One of the greatest blessings of living in St. John's is the fact that we have immediate and extended family here. We have lived in six provinces, and we have more personal connections in this city than any other throughout the almost thirty years of marriage that we are about to celebrate in some way in May. I seek to cherish each person in the family, and be grateful for each person. I do not always succeed.

One of the greatest challenges of living in St. John's is the fact that we have immediate and extended family here. Our personal connections sometimes lead to personal conflict and a re-evaluation of our values and priorities as well as the kind of people we want to be. The family here allows us to exercise some of the conflict resolution skills and boundaries exercises that we have learned over the years. And I still have much to learn. I am far from the person I would like to be both in the best of times and in the worst of times, and everything in between.

The apostle Paul taught that when we give our lives to Jesus Christ, we become a part of God's family, related through the Son. Whether wealthy or poor, well-educated or not, attractive or not, we are related through the blood of the Son of God, when we say "yes" to Him. This family is a new family into which we are born or re-born, as the Scripture says.

And this family is something Paul gives great thanks for being a part. He is so bold to say "I always thank my God for you" in 1 Corinthians 1:4 that we just read. Now you have to try to remember some of all the issues that Paul would raise about the Corinthian church in the rest of the letter before you can understand the power of Paul's thankfulness.

You have to remember that powerful individuals were taking over the service in an unruly manner, speaking whenever they felt like it in the middle service and taking over the service and that's why he tried to teach on what a worship service conducted decently and in order really meant in chapter 14. He taught in chapter 12 on the importance of everyone bringing a special spiritual gift to the body of Christ to build up God's work in the community and in our daily lives, because there was a lot of dissension and

disunity. He taught on love in chapter 13, because a lot of people were having a difficult time loving each other in the Corinthian church. He taught on Holy Communion in chapter 11, the words from which we often read, but the context we do not. He taught on this important practice of Eucharist because it was being abused. Some were getting drunk, some were not even receiving the elements during worship because others were gorging themselves on what they could. He taught on liberty and what it meant to follow Christ and set boundaries, because the Corinthians thought freedom meant having sex with your mother in law, and things even more controversial than that. He taught on unity in chapter 3 because there was such quarrelling and jealousy, including disunity and factions developing around each of the leader's names: Paul, Apollos, Peter...etc.

The Corinthian church was a mess. Today's church worldwide is a mess. I think the church has always been a mess, but it is more than a mess. The church is the bride of Christ, beautiful (even if tattered and torn), beautiful because of the relationship to the One who loves her as she is. I always have difficulty with those who say they can be Christians without the church, with attending or committing to the body of Christ. Of course, you are here. But how can you say you love the Head but not the Body. Because the Church is the body of Christ.

It's not up to me to say outside of our assembly what makes a Christian. But practically speaking, when we talk against other Christians, we are speaking against the parts of the body of Christ. When we speak against the Church, we are speaking against Christ himself, because He is the Head, and He calls us His Body.

We know we are broken. We know He was broken for us. Now this week we have a chance (again) to recognize who we are as Jesus' family. We have a chance to reflect on what we have said to one another about one another in the larger body of Christ. We have a chance to revise our attitudes and actions against other Christians. We have the privilege of serving Christ and his body, his family and our family. Sometimes we forget that when we speak against another denomination, we speak against another part of the family.

Does this mean we can never be critical or constructively reflective of other expressions of Christianity? No. But Jesus was clear that we need to use the same measure that we use against others. Would we stand up to any

criticism we would level at others? What have we not seen when we see the lack or the sin in a brother or sister, congregation or denomination within our city and beyond?

We all have blind spots. I know I do. I wish I could be perfectly objective. I cannot. I fail. I want to be both loving and truthful when speaking about other churches and other Christians. I find I either err in overlooking faults and fleeing conflict, or being too strong in identifying errors and falsehoods. That's me. What about you?

Do you try to get along with everyone at any cost? Or perhaps the opposite, do you speak your mind without thinking about how it is received? I have done both.

The question that remains is how we will build up our family, how we will cherish our family, how we will move in the direction of what Paul says, "I always thank God for you..." May I be so bold to suggest one of the first steps is patience.

Now I am not the most patient of men. Before we make any statements about how patient men are in general, let me simply admit I continually need to grow in learning to be patient and displaying patience. I am hard to be with in traffic with erratic drivers and others with whom I disagree. I do not display the fruit of the Spirit in heavy traffic. But I hope in my becoming aware of this, that God is beginning to change me, maybe a little.

I am not as patient with others who think they know better than I do. But I am learning to listen. At least I hope I am.

I cannot change the body of Christ, the myriad expressions of Christianity, the flaws and sins of the Church and Christians I hear about on the radio and TV fairly often. I probably would not be able to change the minds of those who are preaching in California that the end of the world is coming on May 21 of this year, although I must admit I did think about calling in to the station to ask if they have a backup plan for May 22, just in case their prediction turns out to be a false prophesy.

I can be open to God changing me, my attitudes, my choice to love and be grateful, my boundaries, my commitment to the body of Christ, the family of God. I am giving of my time to the St. John's and Area Council of Churches

to chair the Committee which runs the Week of Prayer which has the three services coming up this week, tonight at 7 at the Worship Centre on Canada Drive; Wednesday night at St. Thomas Church, with Ki Adams doing music and others; next Sunday at Wesley United; all at 7 pm. There's my little advertisement.

All of these services are continuing efforts to put forward small efforts at saying the Body of Christ is bigger than this congregation. We all know that. Now we have a chance to practice it. And perhaps we can join forces with other congregations, not just our sister congregation of St. Andrew's, as good as our times are with them. Perhaps we can continue to think of ways to reach out to the community and one another across denomination. I hope you will give this some thought, just as you will give some thought to how you can help your physical family and the local family of our congregation here.

We are indeed a part of a larger family here in St. John's and it is a blessing. We are indeed a part of a larger family here in St. John's and it is a challenge.

How will you and how will I make our contribution to making the family a better place and a greater blessing?

Let us pray.