

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"Welcoming"  
Dr. J. Dent

June 29, 2008  
Proper 8

On this last Sunday of June, with hopes of Summer still on our hearts and minds, we welcome a little one to the family of God, we welcome our identity within the Canadian federation, we welcome the memory of those who fought for our freedoms during the wars, and we welcome the Lord anew into our lives.

It was Jesus who said in our very short Gospel passage that God won't forget who we welcome, whether it be a righteous person, or a person with a prophetic gift (someone who speaks what God wants to say), or a cup of cold water to a needy person who is a disciple of the Lord. These God will not forget, but reward. And those who welcome us and everyone who has a relationship with Jesus Christ will not be forgotten by God. So we too should be a welcoming people.

But we often do not welcome others the way we could or should. We are more interested in our own relationships and connections, so strangers have a hard time breaking into our church fellowship. In fact, we have a hard time offering a diversity of worship and groups in line with the diversity of needs and spiritual levels of the congregation.

So we are offering a second service, informal, contemporary, different from this one on Saturday nights at seven starting in September 13 to begin to address this need. Everyone of all ages are welcome but we do hope that many who find it difficult to participate in this service, for whatever reason, might give that one a chance. We'll meet in a small group setting in the Armour Room, and we'll do our best to present the Christian message in a different package, but the core of it being exactly what we have here.

We will welcome the Lord into our lives, into our homes, into our intellects and into our lifestyles.

Once we do welcome the Lord and one another into our lives, we are immediately faced with a number of challenges. Abraham's story in Genesis 22 reminds us that our children are a gift from the Lord. Each child must be given back to God for God's purposes and will. If we try to hold on

too hard, we go against God's way and will in the child's life. We simply do our best to direct our children into the way of the Lord, and then trust and pray that they will indeed go that way.

Abraham knew that other gods required child sacrifice. He also knew that his child Isaac was a miracle baby born to senior citizens. If you re-read the story, you will notice that at least twice Abraham trusts that God will deliver his child from the sacrifice. First, he says it in verse 5, when he tells his servant that he and his son will go up to worship and they will both come back. Second, in speaking to Isaac about where the sacrifice was, Abraham tells him truthfully that God himself will provide the lamb. This was not only trusting that a ram would be caught in the thicket in verse 13, but also a prophetic reference to Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate lamb of God. God found in Abraham a friend who would not spare his only son, but trust God for life beyond sacrifice and that the goodness of God wins in the end.

We find it hard to give up our children and their choices to God. We live in an age that no longer points to God and relationship to God as a central goal in life. Our children are bombarded with the media that makes fun of God, makes fun of Christianity and even laughs and mocks our Saviour Jesus Christ. Our morals and ethical positions in the church are thought to be behind the times and outdated.

But the wages of sin is still death, as Paul says in Romans 6, and disagreement with God does not bring a happier or healthier life. Rebellion against God is a form of slavery, not a form of freedom. We need to welcome God's ways into our lives and lifestyles, for this does not come automatically. And in our busy-ness we need to slow down, and learn enough from God to raise our children well, and rightly influence our grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Should we think we already know enough to do this well, then let us think again and humble ourselves to keep learning from Scripture and from the Lord. As the Psalmist says in Psalm 13, we can admit our pain and our grief to God, for many of us have much of both. But in that grieving and in our discomfort, we need to trust in God's steadfast love and in his salvation.

We need to keep praying for our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, for our families and extended families. We need to keep praying for Canada, for justice and righteousness to prevail, and for freedom

for the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is rare to hear the second verse to O Canada anywhere outside of church:

Almighty Love, by thy mysterious power, in wisdom guide, with faith and freedom dower, be ours a nation evermore that no oppression blights, where justice rules from shore to shore, from lakes to northern lights. May love alone for wrong atone, Lord of the lands, make Canada thine own. Lord of the Lands, make Canada thine own.

In 1949, Newfoundland chose to be welcomed into this nation. This welcoming continues to today. With prosperity at the doorstep, if not already in the house, we need to remember to pray, "Lord of the lands, make Canada thine own." And in Newfoundland we are called to remember our provincial motto, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, (and all these things will be added unto you.)"

We realize many gave their lives overseas for this place and her people. We quietly remember them today.

There is a deeper respect in the east for the departed. I don't think it is a morbid focus upon the dead, although it can be. I think people here spend more time away from their regular activities to make time to grieve the lost and to respect their memory, both in the initial visitation and memorial services and then the visitation that goes on from their in the cemeteries. I've mentioned this before, but people in the west no longer have visitation in the funeral homes, and more and more people choose to put into their wills that they want no service at all. While this may be something the individual wants, it tends to be very hard on those left behind, on the family which is seeking to appropriately grieve the passing of the loved one.

We take these moments to simply respect the memory of those who gone before us, not glorify death, but to rejoice in the life and lives that have been given to people here in this smiling land. We welcome their memory.

Let us pray.