

St. David's Presbyterian Church

September 25, 2011

St. John's, NL

"Politics, Honesty and the Servant's Heart"

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We are in the midst of a provincial election and on the news they can tell what day it is in the election and how many more days until the vote. We are also in the midst of looking for new elders for the congregation. When we are honest, most of us much of the time don't have the energy or the enthusiasm for the central role leadership brings in our lives, whether it be politics in the realm of civic government or serious consideration of leadership in church government. Most of the time, many of us ask, "What's in it for me?" And if the answer is, "not much," then we don't have any time for it. But whether we give ourselves to politics, federal, provincial, local or otherwise, we must have a desire to make our lives better, and the lives of those outside our normal circle of friends and family.

In the church, we seek to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ and the possibility of positive change, both inside ourselves and inside others. We invite people to follow Jesus, and we are challenged ourselves to be committed anew to God's best ways for us. It is our reason for being. Before any of us disqualify ourselves for leadership, or lest we too quickly consider ourselves the best for the job, except we have no time, then we will begin a season of what it means to lead, to love, to learn, to serve, and to be grateful for what we have.

Jesus always challenged the religious leaders of his time in amazing ways. The gospel reading from Matthew 21 has Jesus being questioned as to why he might be as bold as he is in doing what he is doing, and saying what he is saying. You realize that he performed many miracles of healing, of resurrection, of loving beyond cultural boundaries. But the things he did, did not satisfy the religious leaders. They expected a verbal defense. Sometimes, in other contexts, Jesus would defend verbally what he had just done, whether it be breaking the Sabbath laws or calling God his Father.

But on this occasion, Jesus simply asks a question in return for a question. Why would he do this? Isn't this simply evasive? No, he gets to the heart of where the leaders are coming from. He simply wants them to commit to whether John the Baptizer's ministry was from God or not.

The reader notes at this point in the story that the Pharisees and the Sadducees are not interested in what they truly believe about John. The question is not answered but rather, the religious leaders are more interested in how they look during the debate. The substance of the answer is not the point, nor even the subject itself. The point is “looking good.” They reason together that if they say John’s ministry is of God, that the people or Jesus will ask them why they didn’t support him. On the other hand, if they say that John’s ministry was not from God, they fear the reaction of the people who solidly believed he was a prophet, just like the prophets of old. So instead of leading, instead of stating what they truly believe, they choose what they think is the answer that will keep them looking best in the greatest number of eyes. This, in a nut shell, is the worst of politics. One worries, not about the realities facing the people, not about their spiritual condition, not about reaching out to those who are neediest, but rather put one’s own reputation and good looks first.

This is why Jesus gives a second story of two sons that were asked to work in the family farm that day. One says “yes, I will;” then decides to do something else. The other says, “No, I won’t” but then decides to do what his father asked him to do. This is about words and actions contradicting each other and why the actions speak louder than the words.

“Looking good” as the bottom line is also why Jesus later says the prostitutes and tax collectors are getting into God’s kingdom before the religious, because these leaders are more concerned with polls and public opinion than they are with truth and reality. They are more worried about how they look than the condition of their souls. This is why Jesus says the addicts and the 12 step program people are going to heaven before the church people. Why? Because they can admit Step #1: My life is unmanageable, I am irritable and unreasonable without knowing, and I need God to help me, to change me. The street people are getting into God’s reign before the respectable, well to do ones because they know how needy they are and they are willing to admit. Now of course this doesn’t mean that all addicts get in to heaven before all church people. It’s about your attitude, about a willingness to express your need, a willingness to turn your life over to God’s care and love. Some choose not to do this, in both categories.

We are all called to serve, to help others as we can, to explain that Jesus provides a way to God, and to help people give their lives to him. Some of us are called to leadership, some to civic government, some to church

government. And we all have a part in choosing these leaders. Each of us, who are professing members here, who have either transferred their membership from another church to here or who have professed their faith here publicly, will have a voice in nominating and electing those who will lead in this body. You need to be thinking and praying about whether you would like to join the professing membership of the church to have a say in this process. Secondly, if you are a professing member, you need to pray about letting your name stand if you are nominated, or about nominating someone else here. This process will take several months and we hope you will make it an important part of your mental and spiritual reflections in this coming school year.

We also hope that you will ask the questions needed, as Jesus did, to get to the heart of what we need here as church, for outreach, for building one another up and for having a Gospel focus for our church. Sometimes we are afraid to ask questions, like “Am I a professing member here?” or “Do I really want to get more involved here?” These are important questions. Some will be questions we can easily answer. Others will be questions that only you can answer, with God’s help. Do you want to serve here with your gifts and abilities, whether you are an elder or not? That is just as important a question as who we will actually nominate and elect as elders in this place.

Also, what does it mean to serve? How are you already in the Lord’s service in your life? Could you explain that service to me in two minutes or less. This too is an important exercise. It is something you could try to do with someone you love today.

The key to all this is honesty. We play so many games with each other and don’t even know it. It is hard to be honest and compassionate, not just brutally honest, but loving as well. Unlike provincial, federal and local elections that seem to come and go quite frequently, we don’t elect elders very often. It has been several years since the last “new” elders were elected.

What we want you to start doing is simply pray, asking God to bring to mind those people who might serve the Lord in leadership here. We also want you to start praying for those people who you think might bring some wonderful gifts into church leadership here. We will be teaching and preaching on this subject, off and on, for many months to come.

And just before we close, and as you pray for church leaders, pray for Amy and James and the newly baptized Allison and Lucy. Pray for their servant hearts to grow and expand, for their commitment to the Lord to deepen and their love for God's people to broaden. Every parent here knows the challenge it is to raise a child in God's way, in Jesus' name. Sometimes we feel we did the best we could. Other times we feel like failures. But we commit ourselves anew to love one another, to be kind to one another and to desire each other's best.

With this in mind, let us pray.