

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"National Eulogies"  
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July 1, 2012  
Canada Day/Memorial Day

Today marks the 145<sup>th</sup> birthday of the nation of Canada and the 96<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle of the Somme in WWI, which we remember in Newfoundland and Labrador because of losing at least 90% of the Newfoundland Regiment, over 600 men. It is a happy event to celebrate Canada's formation, at least I hope it is a happy one for you; and it is a somber occasion, remembering the cost of defending allies, friends and the British Empire of the day. Of course, empires are greatly frowned upon in today's political climate, or rather, political correctness. Even countries are said to exist only in the minds of individuals, according to some historians, so what we see as a national identity or national purpose or national unity is simply a construct of our minds, not an external reality. Thus books are written on the "idea of Canada."

Nevertheless, there is one kingdom, one empire that God has established through Jesus Christ. His kingdom will have no end, according to Scripture and put to music in Handel's *Messiah*. Let us indulge our imaginations for a moment as we look at the history of nations. Since Scripture is clear in supporting the notion of Christ's kingdom having no end, is it possible or even probably that every other nation will indeed have an end? In fact, many nations have already come to their end; indeed, more have been forgotten than currently exist.

If this is true, that every nation will someday end, whether by war or by the end of the age, or by complete anarchy, we don't know; then how might we remember that nation? Some read the book of Revelation as a literal history of the end times, but all it really underscores is the fact that God will indeed judge individuals and nations.

So then, if there were endings of nations, and there was something like a funeral for a nation, what would it be like? This is something that I am unaware of happening today. But let's say, for a moment, that a funeral for a nation is a possibility. What would it look like? And if it looked like an individual's funeral, what tone and what things would be said? If God were conducting the funeral, certainly it would be completely honest, showing the nation's strong points and weak points. God would certainly speak to

whether the nation honored Jesus Christ the Son and how that happened or not. There would be statements about justice, about how people were treated, about the poor, about the weakest in society, about love and sacrifice. I'm not sure how much would be said about sports teams and the economy, very little I think. More would be said about God's ethics, morality and what God thinks about human life throughout the history of that particular nation.

So what would be said at Canada's funeral? What would be said at the United States' funeral? And we could name countries across the face of the planet. This reflection would certainly help us reconsider our nation in light of what God thinks, as revealed in the Scriptures. What characteristics of our nation reflects God's character and personality?

I don't have the answers to these questions. I urge you to reflect on this, so that we can encourage the government to go God's way, but we need to identify what that means and also celebrate what God has already done in our midst.

Many identify our hospitality and welcoming spirit in NL as one of these gifts of God. This of course is counter-balanced by the fact that unless you were born here and your ancestors born here, you will always be "from away," thus granting you resident status, but not true provincial citizen status. And Quebec is the same in this regard.

So what would be said in that national funeral? I ask this in part because I have been reflecting on what David said about Saul and Jonathan in his eulogy found in 2 Samuel 1. He found powerful and positive things to say about Saul. This was in spite of the fact that Saul had been rejected as king and David had been anointed as king years before Saul's death. Both of them knew this. David found powerful and positive things to say even though King Saul had sent out the death squads to kill him. In fact, King Saul had led his whole army out to kill David. There was more than one occasion where Saul had tried to kill David in person, once desiring to "pin him to the wall with his spear." But David still had powerful and positive things to say about Saul in his funeral eulogy. This surprises me. How about you?

God might surprise us with the positive things he would say at Canada's funeral. David not only composed a eulogy, but also a Song, the Song of the

Bow, which was to be taught to the nation to sing in remembrance of Saul and his son Jonathan. David was the singing shepherd who became king. David was Jonathan's best friend. He noted in the eulogy that he had a friendship with Jonathan that surpassed the love of women, which is a statement that unfortunately has been sexualized in our era. But in that era, it was clearly understood as a deep sentiment of friendship between two men. Jonathan's commitment to David was stronger than that to his own father, because he saw God's hand on David, and he saw his own father's rebellion against God. This was indeed a complicated set of relationships as Jonathan sought to be a loyal son, but first of all was committed to God and God's ways.

We seek to say the best things we know how at funerals. We allow the inclusion of eulogies in our services. We acknowledge that we should say something about the deceased. But we also desire first and foremost to lead people to God. For God alone can give us the peace and the serenity we need in the midst of the turmoil, challenges and confusion we often experience in our lives. We often pray at funerals, "Lord, speak to us the words we cannot speak to ourselves," thus acknowledging how important it is to note again that God is alone in control of life and death. Our lives are truly gifts given to us, which we cannot control. We have some things that we can manage. We are given responsibility over our own lives, words, actions, and choices. But we cannot control others and we rarely have as much influence as we sometimes think we have over others.

So we turn to Jesus, who helped the woman who had severe medical problems, bleeding, for more than twelve years. We turn to Jesus, just like the family of the little girl who had died. We turn to Jesus who became poor for us, that we might be rich, i.e. rich in serving others, rich in generosity, rich in hospitality.

As we remember the sacrifice of Newfoundlanders long ago and as we consider the nation we have as a gift together, let us turn to Jesus anew. No matter how the rest of our culture changes, we need to consider anew what it means to honor the Lord with our lives, our words, our actions, our deeds. How can we make this country a better place, from God's point of view?

Let us trust God anew to tell us what we need to hear in this regard. Let us pray.