

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

July 19, 2009
Proper 11

It's summertime. And besides trying to find new ways to recycle water during this drought and outside watering ban, we also find ourselves entertaining visitors, enjoying the sunshine, working in the garden. Summertime is a time to de-stress. It is a time to catch our breath for the rest of the year, the rest of the year that seems so frenetic, overstuffed with stuff. The rest of the year we take so little time to reflect on what's important to us, to enjoy the moments and the days, our friends, family and neighbours. Now's our chance.

The summer is that in-between time, the liminal place, the place that we idealize and seems to be gone before we know it was here. And even more in Newfoundland, where many of us have a love/hate relationship with summer. We want it badly, but if it gets too hot, then we don't. And we want the sun, but if we don't have enough water in our city planning, well then we don't really want the sun, but really the rain, and/or fog, and/or drizzle.

It's almost as if the summer is like an airport. We expect to get there, but we don't expect to be there very long. An airport is a place we go to get somewhere else. Unless you have a conference or something at the airport hotel, you don't ever have the airport as your destination. And so we experience the summer, as a brief place in between places. And if the summer goes beyond July and August into late September and October, all the better.

We all need a place to get away to. Some of us have cabins, or have had them. These are places to which we can escape. They represent rest, refreshment, putting all your cares away. Even though a friend once told me that a cabin is simply another place to do repairs and maintenance if your own home is in good order.

May I suggest that Summer and cabins are attempts at bringing balance to life. You could add many other recreational activities such as outdoor sports, camping, hiking, etc. Much of what we think of these are attempts at

bringing respite to our hyper-paced lifestyles during “the school year,” September to May or June.

Jesus was aware of the need for balance in human life. In Mark 6, we see him in the midst of a very busy ministry, along with his disciples. It is noted in verse 31, that it was so busy, they didn't even have time to eat. So Jesus does a very sensible thing, which indicates to me his sense of balance in life.

He tells them to come away from the busyness and to go to a desolate, deserted, quiet or solitary place, as several translations put it. For you, that might be your cabin, it might be your car, it might be a certain room in your house or apartment. It might be a place on campus, or in a park, or in your backyard. Maybe it is a picture in your head where you go to rest. Wherever it is, it is important for you to note it as such. And if you don't have such a place, seek one. Because this place is your resting place. Jesus says, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” Note here how important it is to get rest.

Since I've spent another week in bed with either migraine or cold/flu, I can testify again that first, it is important to know your limits and to know your need for rest. And second, that it is important to make sure you get a sense of balance in your life, physically, mentally, socially, in every way. Spiritually, Jesus wants us to be able to take time to talk with God, for our sake. He wants us to be vulnerable with Jesus about all our passions and desires, all our dreams and ambitions, all our fears and worries, all our happiness and all our sadness.

The place where we seek rest is a good place to invite Jesus to come and spend time with you there. Read the Scripture there and see what He says to you in that place.

Many of us need to find a place of balance. And it is hard to find that place. At least I find it hard to find that place. It's not something you can legislate into a collective agreement. It's not something most of us find as a part of our professional training or any other training we have taken. Some call it “self-care.” Some call it finding the therapeutic support that you need. Others find it during times of breakdown, melt down, depression, fatigue and other chronic needs. These find such a place because they must, to go on.

But I call it finding balance. I'm not talking about finding the balance between good and evil, nor between Christianity and other spiritual paths. I'm talking about the need for rest, and for creativity in physical, emotional, intellectual and other ways.

I believe exercising one's creativity is a pathway to rest. Of course, this can become work if overdone. But the arts are a way to express our being made in the image of our Creator God. That's why I believe a day off should or may contain a nap, but also should be a time to exercise our creativity. Creativity can be painting, music, games, sculpting, photography, recreation, or whatever is out of the ordinary that refreshes you. It should also be a time to worship the Lord your God.

Summer is a limited time for such expression, a time for comedy and life in many colors. It is a time of exploration, and connection to family and friends. It is also a time to reflect on what is important to us. I hope you can take the time, and as you reflect, also add thanksgiving. Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thes. 5:17)

Finding balance often means taking an inventory of what we are doing, and making sure family, work, church, recreation all falls into the right places. I wish I could tell you the perfect formula. The only one the Scriptures present is the one which draws us closer to Jesus Christ, who continually reminds us that his yoke is easy and his burden is light. For the urbanite, this agricultural image reminds us that we are not treated as beasts of burden in the Christian faith. Jesus is right alongside us in our efforts and daily struggles. He takes the brunt of much as we lean on him, just as yoked oxen helped each other bear the load. And not only does Jesus help us, but also the family of God helps us as well, as we open up to one another, ask for help and as we care for one another. God reminds us we are not alone.

Balance is reaching out to the Lord, and reaching out to one another. Balance is the creative change that brings rest. No matter how well off we are financially, no matter how much we lack financially, we all seek the balance of work, family, faith, and the dreams of a full and joyful life.

Let us help one another, let us pray.