

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"Helping and Healing Ministry"  
Dr. J. Dent

September 9, 2012  
15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

The reality of the faith, the reality of God is firmly established by many evidences. Most of these evidences are disputed today. There is the history of the Jewish people and their relationship with God that brings forth a person, Jesus the Messiah. Regardless of history, many prefer to praise randomness or luck, the luck that we even exist; rather than being dependent beings on a Supreme Being. And for others, the notion that God has visited us in the person of Jesus the Messiah is an impossibility.

So then the question is how we portray the reliability and feasibility of the faith. How can we show others that what we profess to be true is actually true and not just one psychological and philosophical choice in a smorgasbord of possible realities?

These are no small questions. The quick answer is that we can't prove or force others to believe that God is real, that Jesus is the answer to our personal, corporate and world affairs. All we can share is what we ourselves have received from God. It is in that simple sharing of our experience of God that God Himself uses to convince others that He is real and that Jesus is who He says He is. But rather than finishing here with a minute long 200 word sermon, let me make two rather long footnotes.

There are two main ministries God uses to make Himself known to others. And there are many other ways and means God uses. The Bible records these two ministries in today's passages from Scripture.

Throughout the Scriptures, we are encouraged to express our faith, trust and relationship with God through our actions. This is most clearly taught in James where he tells us that our God talk is worthless or dead without helping or serving others. But this is not just a NT understanding. In the book of Proverbs and throughout the OT, we find the Lord teaching his people to be kind to the poor. In so doing, we present the reality of our faith, the practicality of helping those who cannot help themselves. This certainly begins with helping those within the household of faith, the community of faith in God to others who also trust God. But it moves out from there to

whomever we meet on the road, just as Jesus teaches this through the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Generosity is praised in Proverbs 22. Sharing your bread, or more generally your food with those who have little or none is also commended. So we bring grocery items to Bridges to Hope, our food bank and community center.

We are also reminded that it is more important to have integrity and the reputation of integrity rather than power or riches. We must use our power for justice and for caring for people, not taking advantage of others because they are poor or different culturally from ourselves.

As we help others, so we honor God's work here. This does not mean we never confront others or disagree with others or choose not to help someone who continually chooses to take advantage of others. It does mean we have much to learn about wisely helping others. Many times this means allowing others to reap the consequences of their actions and not bailing them out.

Helping others does mean caring for them, building them up, telling them the truth and loving them. This is a main ministry within Christianity. This ministry was a big motivation for establishing hospitals and schools, in helping refugees, orphans, widows, prisoners and other needy ones. These were one way for helping others.

As I have said before, I believe the way I came to faith was through the love of a few fellow students who happened to have been in my music classes in high school. Had they not cared enough about me to risk inviting me to the Bible study and then loving me when I was hard to love, when I made inappropriate jokes or be the center of attention; had they not cared for me in that group, I may not have experienced the love of God the way I did. Now God may have still gotten a hold of me in some other way. But this loving and helping and caring for me was the way God used other Christians to draw me to God.

I believe this is still a major way that God draws us in to the church, to the work of God today. James does too. James saw that many individuals in the church of his day were discriminating against the poor and not caring for them as they did for those with means. He felt this was breaking down the church and going against the purposes of God in drawing everyone, from

every socio-economic class and every race and culture to the Lord. So he wrote the church quite plainly that it does not make any sense for people to turn the poor away, when it was the rich who had been exploiting church people. The key was not to judge people about how much money or property or nice clothes they owned, but simply to welcome them to God's house. If we were to simply welcome them and practically help them know God, by sharing our food, giving them rides when they needed transportation and making sure they experienced grace and the reception of many gifts, then the kingdom of God would be indisputable. Today we give most of these challenges over to the government. Perhaps we should not. But in those days, the new church was the way to help people in need. In any case, voluntary kindness is the best, creatively offered. In Canada, one of the greatest slights you can give someone is "be warmed, eat well" but not offer a coat or food. So help others, as you are able.

For helping others draws them to God. But also we find from the Gospel passage in Mark 7, that the other ministry that draws people to God is the healing ministry. This was one of Jesus' main ministries. Re-read the Gospels, or read them for the first time, and note how often Jesus heals.

It's amazing how Jesus miraculously heals, the deaf hear, the mute speak, the spiritually tormented are set free. How do we participate in his healing ministry? We too can pray for those who are suffering from various ailments. We can give people the freedom to speak what they need to say and listen, that can be healing in itself. We can remind others and ourselves that we cannot force people to believe in God; nor even trust God. We simply share what happens in our lives when we do trust God and God helps us or transforms us.

There are many small and practical ways to be a healing presence for others. Listening, loving, telling the truth, praying out loud with others; these are some of the ways. We can be those who bring others to God who then shoulders their burdens; burdens which might be crushing for an individual without God.

Helping and healing paradoxically can take place as we give up trying to help or control others. Sometimes we simply have to let them experience the natural consequences of their actions, rather than shielding them or enabling them to do something without the force of the consequences.

Helping and healing requires us to remember that no one else is responsible for peace and contentment inside us. Gratitude helps. And I am no expert at gratitude. But I do still contend for a new longer season of thanksgiving, Sept., Oct. and Nov.

So we help and heal, and direct others to the One who is the ultimate Helper and Healer.

Let us pray