

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"The Power of Prayer"  
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The devil is called Beelzebub in Matthew, Mark and Luke 11:15, 18, 19. I understand this to be a designation which means "lord of the flies." Now in Newfoundland and many other places in Canada, we have some terrible biting flies and I can't think of a person who enjoys them nor their bites, particularly during these wonderful summer days in the country. But even if we think of the average housefly, distraction is what it drives us to. We can begin to understand that part of what the devil wants to do in our lives is to distract us from our true calling, our true destiny and the enjoyment of the glory of God. Distraction dominates the devil's business. If he can distract us from the ultimate concerns of life, then he will have partially gained his goal.

When we are distracted by the noise and the pace of life, we do do do, but do not be be be. I mentioned last week that we don't have the quiet we need and therefore we don't get the focus necessary for carrying out the jobs of the kingdom of God assigned to us. So we shouldn't be too surprised at the place of the Church in today's society. The noise becomes as intense as the boom boom boom of the sub-woofer in the car next to us. *Insert your story here.*

Indeed many of us, perhaps all of us cannot imagine a time, let alone have lived a time without the noise of the radio, without the noise of the television, without the noise of the computer. Those are basically the three, make that four generations that sociologists call the survivors, those who lived through the depression of the thirties and, the boomers (1946-1965) so called because of the baby boom after WWII, the busters (which come after the boomers, when the boom was over) and now their children (be that X or Y or whatever designation comes online).

The distraction of noise in our lives can be intense and desperate. Can it be that we are fearful of the quiet, of solitude, of the place apart where we can not only hear ourselves think, but also hear God speak? Here is where the call to pray is the same to every generation. But can we take a break from

the noise long enough to pray? That seems to be more the question than is what form of prayers we use, or what subjects we cover with God.

If we can't find an answer in our daily lives for making time to pray, then we dare not ask what we should pray about. And so as I begin to concentrate on the power of prayer, I realize there is first of all a call to take time apart from the noise and pray. Now this is not a new message for many, in fact it is a seriously old message. But it reinforces the fact that no relationship goes forward without putting time into it. This is as true with God as it is with any other person. When we want to get know someone we spend time with them. We creatively plan how we might steal away to some wonderful spot with that person. We dream about that person and prioritize our head spaces and our heart spaces around that person. It is the same way with God. And we have the rest of our lives to be drawn to Him. So it is good to take time this summer to reorganize your head space and your heart space for Him. What that looks like will be as individual as you are. Where and when that takes place will be at times and places that you can set aside to the One you call Manager and Master, Lord and Friend.

Abraham is one example of a person who followed God and concentrated his life on him. He went away from the familiar and followed God. He heard his promises and believed him over and over. He wasn't perfect, but he cared enough about God in his life that it showed. What is in our lives that would convict us of being Christian, if a time ever came where we would have to go to court to prove whether or not we had a living relationship with God?

Abraham talked to God, not in a delusional way as is characteristic of some with mental disorders. He spoke to Him and heard direction. Whether this came audibly or whether he just knew, we don't know. The Bible records some of these interactions as conversations, and so we should take them at face value. In Genesis 18, we find Abraham interceding or being the go-between for the wicked city of Sodom. He starts by asking if a portion of the city could be saved from God's judgment if only a small portion of the city's inhabitants were righteous, were just. He continues asking until he pleads for a number of only ten righteous ones in the city. Apparently there were not even ten, which is probably the case for the cities of the world today.

As Abraham did, so we too plead for God's generosity and mercy in the lives of those God puts in our path everyday. We pray for those among families and friends who seem to be going every which way but God's. We pray for this city and its direction and for the leaders of the city to continually make decisions that will be God-honouring, and help the gospel of Jesus Christ go forward in strength and peace.

In the end, God draws people to himself. We merely make suggestions and hope that the Holy Spirit will woo others into this love relationship we know, which someone has help us to know. We cannot, nor should we force others in that direction. We point others to the life source (beggars to food, *Living Faith* 9.2.1). We leave the results to God.

But meanwhile we talk to Him. All our questions, all our conundrums are offered up to Him. He knows. He hears. And as the Psalmist says in Psalm 138, in verse 3: I call. He answers. I gain strength. And he notes that those who humble themselves before God have an audience with God. Those who already know it all, see God far, far away. Those in trouble experience deliverance, and help when they cry out.

And this is a major part of prayer life: crying out. My favourite prayer: "Help!" Short, even shorter than my name. To the point. But it encapsulates the state of my heart at the moment. And that is the key. Express the depths of your heart to him. He can take whatever complaints, whatever wondering, whatever you have to say. But the short thesis of this sermon is: don't ignore Him. God always finds a way to get our attention, and do so over and over. The question is not whether God will do His part, but whether we're interested in doing ours.

There will always be other philosophies out there to compete with basic Christian beliefs. There will always be other information to compete with what we believe about Christ. But Paul in Colossians, chapter two wants to remind us that we shall never be satisfied with them as we can be in Christ. He has dealt with the issues of life and death, in and out, the shadow and the reality. When we choose him we choose life, being in all the benefits of what he did for us, and the reality not the shadows, not the noise of life.

And so how should we give ourselves to Jesus, once we have chosen his way? This was the disciples' question in Luke 11. So Jesus says, "Here are

some suggestions: Talk to God with respect and intimacy. He knows you better than your own dad does. Agree with what God is doing in your neighborhood. Then Jesus talked to his friends about lifestyle. He reflected on the words of Agur in the Proverbs 30. If you haven't read them lately, maybe do so this afternoon. He starts out with the words "I am weary, O God. I am weary and worn out." So he is someone we, at least I, can relate to in the Bible. He also goes on to ask God to keep him honest and not to allow him to have too much, because then he will be tempted to forget about God and deny the reality of his existence by his greedy and self-sufficient lifestyle. He also asks him to not allow him to be too poor and tempted to steal thus defaming or insulting God. But rather give me just enough, so that I can keep my perspective and balance. Now what does that mean? Jesus interprets it as daily bread. You and I live in between Solomon's billions and the homeless man's backpack. It is a call to simplicity no matter what your bank account looks like.

And Jesus talks about relationships and expresses the fact that forgiveness from the heart is what makes them work. And forgiveness is another whole sermon for another time. And then he tells a story we don't understand because we don't understand the culture of the time, although it does happen in the middle of the night and relates to toast, if not tea. So it could have happened here in Newfoundland.

The man is awakened by his friend because his friend has to show hospitality but cannot. So it is up to the whole village to show that hospitality and he cannot put his sleep ahead of that hospitality. If he does, he will be thoroughly shamed and embarrassed and so will the village. Because they understand shame as do many Asian cultures, they understood the message of asking for bread as a means of showing hospitality and not shaming themselves and their families.

And because they understood why the man would be asking for bread, and why the person asked should give it, Jesus goes on to teach about the character of God.

You know, Jesus says, God is not a bad dad. If one of your children asks you for food, do you give them poison or something else to injure them? No. You give them what they need. Now they might always ask for Fruit Loops, so you might have to give them something better than what they

asking for, but you will give them what they need. How much more will God do for that child of God crying out for care, for justice, for love?

And so I end as Luke does, saying God is looking to bless you, care for you, enrich your life and feed you.

He is so much more caring and full of life and justice than we sometimes think. So give him the time, and he'll give you what you need. Prayer is the lifeline in your relationship to God just as talking/communication is to any relationship to another human being.

We know this. Now let us reflect on what we do and change as God gives us grace. And let's keep talking...me with you, you with me.

Let us pray.