

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"The Power of Friendship"
Dr. J. Dent

June 21, 2009
Proper 7/Picnic Sunday

To Children: Do you have any friends? How do you know they are your friends? What would you do for your friend?

A friend is a great treasure. If we have a friend who cares about us for many years we are greatly blessed.

There is a friendship in the Bible that is recorded between two famous people. One was named David. He was a hero to the people, because he was very brave and courageous. He went out during a war and defeated an enemy who was twice his size and height, whose name was Goliath. And he did it with a sling shot even though Goliath had armour and a sword and a big shield. You can read about that in the Bible in 1 Samuel 17ff. David was blessed by God in everything he did. And the king whose name was Saul was impressed. So he invited David to live with him in his castle.

During this time, the king's son, Jonathan, became best friends with David. He saw what David was doing, and loved him better than a brother. Jonathan gave him his armour and his sword, his best clothes, because he wanted to honour David. Jonathan, as the king's son, had the best things in the land, and gave much of it to David to say how much he wanted David to succeed in everything he did.

But a problem developed. David became such a great warrior, that Jonathan's father, King Saul, made him the general of his army. But as Saul saw David do better than he did at leading the army, he demoted him to leading a 1000 men. Then he simply became ugly and jealous. Saul got moody and violent. Even though David had done nothing wrong, the relationship between David and Saul became so bad that every time Saul saw David, he wanted to kill him. This made it very hard for David and Saul to be friends and to hang out together. Jonathan could see that David would have to go away, so that his father Saul would not hurt him. Jonathan and David made a promise to each other that not only would they be friends forever. They also promised to help each other's families, no matter what happened in the future.

This is amazing because it was supposed to be Jonathan who was going to be king. He was the king's son. Usually the king's son becomes king after the king retires or dies. But Saul had rebelled against God, and had told God in his actions that he didn't want God's plan or ways in his life. So God agreed with Saul's not wanting God's plan and started to look for someone else to carry it out. So God chose David, who was simply a young man looking after sheep, who sang and played the guitar (or some other stringed instrument of the day).

One of the beautiful things in this story is that God had chosen David, and Jonathan wanted David's best as his closest friend, and so he was okay with David being king. He would go along with God even though he wouldn't get all the power and all the goodies he might have had, as Saul's son and as the future king. Jonathan too was a mighty warrior, courageous and bold. He saw what his father went through and had to struggle with it, the rest of his life.

Each of us as fathers do the best we can. My father gave me a mixed legacy of blessings and other stuff. Boys and girls, I am sure you fathers are the same. I encourage every father to be honest with what he has received, and with whatever he struggles with. My father was generous like Jonathan. But he too could be explosive like Saul. Fathers can be a blessing. Today is a day to think about our fathers, and to be thankful and truthful about all that our fathers have given us, and to offer praise and thanksgiving to God for them.

Adults: It's hard to find a good friend, isn't it? A friend is: Someone you can talk to without judging you; someone who seems to understand you and care about you; someone who will listen, but also give to the relationship; someone who wants your best; someone who will support you no matter what, but also challenge you when you are going the wrong way.

Children, adults: Church can be a place where you make friends. It can be a place where you can bond at the deepest level, that of your faith. You can play together, talk together, learn about God together. You can make a choice to read the Bible together, to pray with each other, to want each other's best.

To know Jesus Christ and one another, there is no higher gift. Church is a place for making that happen. And we even have more than one church here today together, so I thought I should share a little bit about friendship between our congregations.

But first let me say that I suck at being a friend. I'm learning, but I think I've been taught over the years that you can be off on your own and that if you're really tough and self-sufficient, that's the best. But it's not. We need each other. And one person that I'm getting to know as a friend is David, your Minister at St. Andrew's. He is a wonderful guy. And he is very patient with me on the racquetball court and in the presbytery court. He's clear and stable in his faith, and I appreciate him very much.

I wish I had a tenth of the spirit of Jonathan in the Bible, always wanting the best for David, lavishly giving him of the royal gifts he himself had received. I do long for this David's best, and for St. Andrew's best. I do long for growing together in as many ways as we can. We have different talents, abilities, gifts, and we need each other. Our friendship together is not something we can take for granted. We will have storms ahead, as we read in the gospel of Mark. But weathering them as God wants means turning to Jesus and expressing our concern to Him together. We do that here today in worship.

And similarly with our congregations. We cannot take the bonds that we form during these times as insignificant. The people we meet this day for the first time and those we have known for many years and everyone in between, will change our lives for the better, if we let them. What we do during our Holy Week services and what we do at the picnic, and what we do when we exchange pulpits, is simply to help each other. And by the way, we will be exchanging pulpits this Fall. So stay tuned.

And we are taking steps to hire a youth worker for our two congregations. This is partly because we need help, Jonathan and David, in this part of the ministry here. But it is also because we have formed important bonds of friendship and because we trust each other.

In conclusion, whether you like flipper or lobster or both, let's decide today to build each other up, build each other's congregation up, to long for God's best, not only for St. Andrew's and St. David's but for the whole church in

the city, that God's kingdom would be sought first, and all the other things will be added to us.