

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

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Last week we spoke about the major change in history that happened exactly ten years ago on 9/11. Life around the world changed that day. New wars, terrorism, security initiatives, all kinds of things changed that day.

But in many ways we still live day by day, like we have since the dawn of humanity. We still eat and drink, have lodging, clothes, purposeful work. And beyond physical survival and health, we see much more in life. We see the beauty of September here in Newfoundland. We see the many gifted artists and their work here. We hear and touch their work.

Day by day we consider the spiritual side of life. At least I hope you do. Spirituality is not just something that enters our lives on Sundays. We look to God throughout all the ups and downs of our lives, whether on a day where we can show hospitality to strangers, as was so ten years ago, or whether on a day that is as ordinary as any other day.

As we read in the Gospel today, there is only one wage in the end that counts. We either choose the wages of sin, of rebellion against God, OR the wages of following God, trusting Jesus, loving the Light of the World, as John called his Lord.

We can, each one of us, choose this day who we will serve. It's not about whether you have served and loved the Lord all your life or if this is your first day in church hearing things that are brand new, or anything between these two extremes. It is about consciously choosing to do the Lord's work today, as long as there still are todays to work.

We have just officially and publicly recognized Amy being our new Youth Minister. We are so pleased that we can spend some money and use Amy's gifts for this important ministry to this part of the church. At the same time, we will be called upon to give to this ministry, whether it is a meal or a moment, or more time or some money. Whatever it will be, there is always a cost to ministry, to choosing the Lord's way. It costs you, it costs me to follow Jesus.

Paul was very plain when he talked to the congregation in Philippi about their conflicts and about their spiritual lives. He wanted each one of them to live lives worthy of the gospel, not just the ministers and leaders who promised publicly to do so, a practice we still do today. He wants all of us to live lives worthy of the gospel, the good news that Jesus does make a big difference in how we live, how we think, how we respond to all the needs around us and in us.

Sometimes these needs are overwhelming. Just watching the daily news is often overwhelming. Our inner needs are often difficult to discern until there is a crisis in us or someone close to us. Then they can become overwhelming as well.

All we have is today. We really don't know a lot about the future, and the past is passed. As my friend from New Zealand used to say, "Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, all we have is today, right now." Right now we can choose to remember to live life a day at a time. Instead of constantly rushing, we can pause and reflect and refresh.

In the desert after Moses had led the people out of Egypt, the place where they had been slaves, Moses may have thought that it was going to be easier than the miraculous plagues that he brought by God's hand. He might have thought that it was going to be a lot easier than beating Pharaoh's army, which God accomplished.

But in the desert, in the place of extreme heat and extreme cold, people voiced something Moses thought he would never hear. They longed for the gardens and wells they had back in the land of slavery. They forgot about the beatings and forced labour, the killing of the male children. All they could remember were the leeks and onions, which are symbols of a powerful garden.

Now God was trying to teach the people something new through Moses. It was something they had never seen before and something they would never see again. It appeared like large snowflakes on the sand, tasted like honey and nuts, maybe something like those sesame thins, and it came out every night, with twice as much on Friday night, so the people would not harvest it on Saturday, the day of rest in ancient times. Of course today, many of us have both the Jewish and Christian days of rest, Saturday and Sunday, which is how we got our weekends. But this strange stuff, appearing as food in the

desert, did not have a name. They did not call it “no name.” They called it “what is it?” which in Hebrew is ma-nah, or “manna.” The manna was a way to show the people that God would take care of them day by day. Just as the sun would rise and set every day, so would the manna come. And there would be just enough, for everyone. So those who could only harvest a little were satisfied and those who could harvest a lot didn't have too much. They were told not to store it up. Some tested God in this, and found that the manna went putrid, if they tried to store it, hoard it or control it. Interestingly enough, the double portion on Fridays did not go putrid but stayed good for two days.

There was and is a spiritual teaching in the manna. Here we have the bread of heaven, a title Jesus used for himself, coming down every day. So we too are to take time to harvest our spiritual bread every day, in our prayers before we go to sleep, in our prayers at our meals and in the daily reading of Scripture which is also a harvest of the bread of life. There is no set time or obligation throughout the day for when to pray. But we are to use our freedom to serve the Lord, whether with youth, with older people, with family, with friends, with neighbors, with co-workers, with everyone God puts in our path.

How do you make sure you receive the bread of heaven, the manna, everyday? It is not about the amount of time you take, but about your desire, your hunger for the bread of life. It is not about it being first thing in the morning or last thing at night, although some of us find these times best. It is about trusting God, and wanting to learn God's ways every day.

The manna is a symbol of what some call the daily devotional. How do you take time out of your schedule to show your devotion to God? There are many ways to do so. Be sure to share this week or today with someone close to you what you do, or what you would like to do, and need help to do...

The newly freed slaves in the desert got their bread, but they soon complained about that as well. Most leaders know that people tend to complain. I don't think many people think of themselves as complainers. They just develop the habit. And it is a hard habit to break. So Amy, you may hear some complaints. This might not come as a shock to you, but there it is. And once in a while, I hear the same.

Let me say that it is not always wrong to complain. The person who complains to someone who can do something about it, and also seeks to help with the solution, rather than simply dumping the complaint, that person is a gift. Most of us don't need someone to point out all our faults, because as it is, we are overwhelmed with those faults and sins. But the person who sees the faults and wants to be a part of the solution, there is a blessing. The blessed person is the one who gets no pleasure from seeing other's faults, but rather weeps with those who weep and laughs with those who laugh. The person who wants to encourage and build up as much as possible: that person is a gift, a real gem.

God knows the cries of our hearts and wants to fulfill them, where life flows from those cries. The cry for meat in the desert was also met by God's creativity to blow a bunch of birds off course and have them all land where the Israelites were camping in the desert. But even then, some overeat and got sick, because they thought this would be it, and God wouldn't provide.

We are tried in many areas of our lives to see whether we will seek our own will, own wisdom, our own well furrowed ruts of rebellion, or whether we will seek God's help, seek out one another's help, no matter what it costs us. Let us help one another and hear one another.

Let us pray.