

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"The Refreshing Ministry of the Holy Spirit"
Dr. J. Dent

May 23, 2010
Pentecost Sunday

Many of us work or occupy ourselves in strenuous ways much of the year, so when the Spring or Summer comes, or whatever season we want to call the twenty-fourth of May weekend, we look forward to the refreshing time needed to rest and recuperate. Not everyone gets this time off, some stay working most weeks and most weekends regardless of statutory holidays.

But no matter what our work schedule is, no matter whether we are retired or still in school, we look forward to our breaks and changes to catch our breath, to exercise a different part of the brain, to kick back and relax, and here you can probably insert the message of your favorite beer commercial, regardless of whether you like beer or not.

We cherish our times "off" because we don't have to face the same kinds of stress, we don't have "heavy" responsibilities, we simply can be and relate to others on the basis not of performance or production, but just of who we are. I've been thinking lately about the ministry of the Holy Spirit, whose holy-day we celebrate today, on Pentecost. It was the Holy Spirit, that brought the new church into being. It was and is the Holy Spirit who encourages us to believe and gives us grace to give ourselves to God, even when our tendency is to rebel. It is the Holy Spirit who comforts us when we need peace and care. It is the Holy Spirit who teaches us right from wrong and gives us wisdom in relationships when we ask.

The Holy Spirit is the breath of life, hovering over creation even before creation existed as we understand it. This same Holy Spirit breathes life into us, and tells us we belong to God, as we read in Romans 8. This same Holy Spirit teaches us, when we open ourselves and say, "Come, Holy Spirit, I want to learn your ways, I have seen where my ways lead me." Pentecost is the festival of the Holy Spirit, the teacher, the initiator, the comforter.

I want to share a few things we learned at the Stewards by Design weekend in Niagara Falls two weekends ago. One is: it is okay to hold one time events: one time Bible Studies, one time Informational sessions, one time Dinners, one time Celebrations, one time special appeals, one time

outreaches. Sometimes many of us feel like we have to sign up for something that takes a whole semester or season or year or even a lifetime. But we are living a time when it is okay to offer one time events. The way the teacher put it was that we are invited to honour both fine marathon runners as well as excellent sprinters. Not everyone does the long haul marathons, not everyone can sprint in the hundred meter events, let's honour both. We are going to be more creative in choosing our projects and outreaches, we already do well in what we do, but perhaps we can serve the community and one another more creatively, and even get more people on board in one time commitments rather than long term, heavy commitments. Many people don't like signing up for being on committees, or if they do sign up for the committee, don't seem to care if the committee ever meets or not.

Maybe we are living in a time where we can cancel our committees. Now I'm not suggesting we cancel our Board or Session or any of the current groups going on. But perhaps we can find ways so that we can really want to fulfill the purpose of the committee or meetings without them being such a burden, and therefore often a failure, or at least a no show.

I believe that not only at this conference but in general in our life together in the church, we need more refreshing. I believe the Holy Spirit is allowing us to consider new and fun ways of being the church together. Remembering together that God is in our midst, taking our burdens, rather than heaping on more. What will this mean for our activities throughout the year? I'm not sure at this point. I do believe we need places to dream about what we are meant to do, as well as places to carry out those dreams.

What are your dreams for St. David's? Would you be willing to share them with me, or the elders or others in the church?

We are being called to do well and to enjoy what we do. How can we keep up a level of refreshment, while still going forward? One thing to keep in mind is that we are here for the people, the people of the church, the people of the community, the people across the world that we can help and love and show God's care and love. First of all, we need to remember how God has helped each one of us, and how we understand God to be continuing to help us to be here for one another and others.

Whenever we have an activity or group in the church, let's ask the question: who is this for? Little things point to whether we are serious in open our doors to others and to grow as a congregation.

One little thing is parking. Everyone here knows how few spaces there are in the lot. The consultant we met with in Niagara Falls, Dr. Callahan, spoke with us about how we will show others that there is space for them here. If our lot is full, new people won't know about parking at Johnson's or at the Towers at the video store. So they will see the full lot and go on to the next church. There are some major ways we can address this, but there are some smaller immediate ways as well.

For example, we can save spaces for first time attendees on Sunday. I am going to commit to be the first one to give up my spot. I am wondering if anyone else would commit to do the same. And then I am wondering if some signage could be created over highly visible spots so people will know there is space for them here.

Perhaps this is exceedingly small, but how else can we practically say to someone they are welcome here. The vast majority of us drive here. Let's continue to talk together to work at this problem, because my choice simply is one choice. But all of us together can come up with some great ideas and even better than that, some great actions.

If you had to say what you thought St. David's was known for in the community, what would that be? Now, how can we improve on that one thing?

It's the little things that make us a place of refreshment, like the colourful tulips out front, and the roses and trees. It's reminding one another to be thankful for what we do have and who we have in our lives. It's learning to encourage and praise, and make a point of saying some good about someone else (preferably before they die).

It's about learning to become more generous, with our words, with our actions, with our outreach, with our money and resources. I often quote the pastor who says one of the major teachings of the Bible is that we only get to keep what we give away. Some of us are in a stage of giving away. A friend told me this week that she only got \$13 for two full boxes of books, expensive art books and the like. But at least they are gone. Generosity, of

course is more than getting rid of things we don't want, it is a basic attitude and lifestyle of giving and thanksgiving.

What are we called to be like during the summer? During our refreshment period, when we get to go away and spend time in wonderful, creative ways, what does our time here look like?

I wish I had all the answers sometimes as to how to make this place be the best it can be. I don't. But I know someone does. That is the Holy Spirit, the wind that blows, not the cold, biting wind. The Holy Spirit is the warm wind that refreshes and opens up new possibilities, for peace, for serenity, for being in tune with God, sensitive to others, and ready for all manner of good things.

The Holy Spirit also reminds us that we are not the church alone. Although we might be one of the first churches planted in St. John's continuing to today, there are more than fifty churches here reminding us that the body of Christ is much larger than our own denomination and affiliation. The Global Day of Prayer event helps us remember that the body is so much bigger. I hope you will be able to make the time to come out and take in the wonderful service with all its diversity and power.

The power of the Holy Spirit is the One who continues to create hope in us, hope for truth, hope for love, hope for refreshment.

Let us pray.