

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Enrolled in Many Schools"
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Presentation Sunday

My grandparents had only a little bit of formal education, and they were born in the 19th century. My parents had quite a bit more, with my mother getting her B.A. in Psychology and my father finishing high school but then serving in the Merchant Marine in World War II. He had a scholarship to go and be an engineer, and I think he probably would have liked at least one of his boys to have gone that way, but none of us did. I spent seventeen years in post-secondary education. In Saskatoon, I used to tell the boys and girls in the Children's Time that I was in grade 25. That was 1989. I wanted to give those who were good at Math a little challenge.

But when I say in the sermon title that we are all enrolled in many schools, I am not thinking of McGill, or Regent, or Berkeley or Ottawa U, from where the Masters' Degrees and Ph.D. come. I am thinking of what all of us get enrolled in, no matter what we think about educational systems. Lynn homeschooled our daughters for twelve years and so we know something of alternate education as well.

I am not referring to the homeschooling and de-schooling options of today, nor am I referencing the public or private school systems. I am thinking about the schools in which we are enrolled, for which we did not sign up. There are many of these. That parenting course which is still going on, and probably will not finish before we die. Then there is that conflict resolution course that we are still learning and maturing and growing in knowing. There is that counseling course that continually takes us back to listening. There is the course in Phys. Ed. that never stops, because we keep having to decide what to do about our bodily health, or try and ignore it. Then don't forget that history course that teaches us that human beings haven't changed all that much over the centuries and millennia. So many courses, so little time.

There is the Sunday School, or Church School or even Sabbath School that many of us got growing up. Many young ones don't have it today, and people are more ignorant of the Bible and faith issues than ever before. And the statistics show that many use the confirmation course as a graduation out of church, rather than into mature faith. But then the life seasons come with

weddings and baptisms and some of them do return. What are your memories of Sunday School? What will our children remember about St. David's? How will you and I encourage our children to really care about their faith? And yes, we still are in the process of hiring a Youth Worker for both St. David's and St. Andrew's. But all of this simply leads us back to the courses God tells us we are being taught in life.

St. Paul teaches us about three courses in Romans 5 that believers are enrolled in, perhaps without knowing it. The first school is the school of... do you know what it is? ... suffering, or Knocks College, spelled k-n-o-c-k-s, School of Hard Knocks.

This is not a school that many parents consciously enroll their children in. I may be an exception. My father and brothers beat me up fairly regularly at a young age. This has greatly influenced me, what I am like, my fears, my anxieties, how I look at other people, other men.

Paul had in mind that we would suffer as a result of speaking up for our faith position in a culture and world contrary to that position. He wanted us to know that suffering was okay for believers to go through. I'm not referring to a child being beat up at school or home as okay. I am referring to a person who takes the flack for speaking up for what they believe as a Christian. This is not an age where there is much tolerance for such speaking out. Yet we are called to give a defense for the hope that we have within us. So Paul says that it is not only okay for us to speak out, and take the flack and suffering that some might give in return for our speaking out, he says it produces a kind of endurance in us that is good for us and good for the Gospel.

This second school, the school of endurance drives us back to the etymology of the word, that moves us to the definition: endurance (Greek: *hypomonè*) is the act, quality or power of withstanding hardship or stress. In other words, we get tough enough to hold on to that which is right and true. We develop our spiritual muscles and the whole body reaps the benefits of such development. We develop patience and fortitude. We become steadfast and we learn to persevere.

It's easy to say that I'll love you for the rest of my life. It's another thing to live it. It's easy to say I'll be your life long friends, it's another to be that person. It's easy to say I'll be there for you no matter what, until you find

out what the “no matter what” actually is. In the parables of the garden, it is the manure, the fertilizer, the compost, the stinky stuff of life that show our endurance, our ability to stick with it, stick with him, stick with her, to stick with the Lord no matter what.

And when you find that person, you have found a true treasure, much better than that old \$1200 an ounce gold, or precious metals or jewels. The one that gives you grace and speaks the truth to you and loves you no matter what, that a person with great character.

In fact it is that person who teaches you about the one of the most valuable commodities in life, which also happens to be the third school in which we are enrolled. That school is hope. This is not a hope that is based on always trying to be optimistic even when all the evidence leads you another way. This is the hope that comes when we know the reality of grace and forgiveness in our lives, when we know that we are loved and when we know there is much to live for in this life, starting with God himself.

Hope is something, like faith, where we trust in the goodness and truth of the Lord without seeing it or even experiencing it right now. It is the confidence that God is good and will bring to fulfillment all we need in justice, in personal peace and serenity, in community and in depth of relationship. Remember Paul puts faith, hope and love as the three greatest gifts. Hope allows us a sense that everything will turn out all right in the end. Hope teaches us that life is not a joke, that this world is not just hard and then we die. We have much to learn from hope, through the mouth of Wisdom, as she speaks in Proverbs. Listen to hope, go to her classes often. She will guide you through suffering and through endurance. She will give you grace to make it through whatever you are going through. I say she, but I know and you know that the feminine voice of wisdom is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Hope guards us from disappointment, as Christ's love pours into us usually through other people. We can choose to see the opportunity in the difficulties we face rather than seeing the difficulties that prevent us from enjoying the opportunity. We can choose to be thankful. Hope and Thanksgiving are close sisters. They draw us to the good we see in life. They draw us to the light.

So let us learn through all the schools in which we are enrolled in this life. And let us help our children understand the One in whom we put our trust, even Jesus Christ, let us pray.