

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Dreams, Hopes, Losses, Grieving..."
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11th Sunday after Pentecost

A lot of us love watching the Olympic Games. The Summer Olympics particularly amazes me with the gymnastics; the young women and men who can seemingly fly up into the air and do numerous twists and turns without the help of the movies and special effects. Similarly with the 10m platform diving and springboard diving.

There's something about the Olympics, where the world as a whole turns its attention away from all the things that divide it and consume it in wars to numerous sporting events, on the water, in the air, on the track, higher, faster, stronger. There's something about a person's whole life being dedicated to one thing, swimming, or running with a couple decades of daily experience culminating literally in a few seconds or minutes. The 100 m dash now being under the ten second mark; the 200 m under the 20 second mark. The swimming going faster. The totals in decathlon and heptathlon being higher than ever before.

The dreams and hopes of the athletes run high even as many interviews seem to say, "I've done my best, I've recorded personal bests. I am pleased." On the other hand, in the team sports, some of the dreams and hopes are dashed by poor refereeing or by poor performance. The women's soccer was hard to watch against the US. Then there were those whose final Olympics hopes and dreams were dashed, our triathlete who crashed in the cycling portion, our kayaker who lost in the final few yards, still taking the silver, some divers who had hoped to get close to the top three but did not, the amazing 4 x 100 relay team that was disqualified and many other examples could be given.

So much pressure coming down to a few centimeters, a few seconds, a few minutes, or a few hours. We relate to these elite athletes, although I know I was never an elite athlete, I don't know about you. We relate with their defeats, and their wins when it wasn't expected as they were the underdog. We relate to those who had high expectations on them and lost. We relate to those who were relatively unknown and won.

I think we also relate to King David as he sings his songs in the Psalms, which is part of the reason we read from the Psalms every week. We relate to his elation over what God is doing. We relate to his flaws and sins. At least, I do.

Last week, we saw his sexual sin that led to murder. We heard God say that what he was trying to do in secret would be out in the public through his family. Now whether we see this as the punishment of God or as the natural consequence of David's sin influencing his sons, I leave that to you.

What we know for sure is that David had a great vision for his kingdom as God's kingdom. He wanted the best for God and offered to build him a nice temple. Instead, God promises David that one of his offspring will bring in an eternal kingdom, one that will have no end. This kingdom is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. But David certainly must have thought that one of his sons might have been the beginning of such a kingdom. Instead, what David saw was his son Absalom the Handsome, desiring to take over his throne by force while he was still alive. He wanted to kill his brothers to make sure he would have the throne. He mustered an army and wooed some of David's counselors and followers away from him to set up a new kingdom, one with Absalom as King. Absalom went as far as having sex with David's wives so that everyone would know that he had broken relationship with his father.

So in the end, David's army fights with Absalom's army. Over 20,000 die in these skirmishes, about the same number as those dead in the Syrian civil war today. David asks his men to spare Absalom's life, because he is still his father. He still loves his son even after his son has so radically and violently rebelled against him. Absalom is killed in battle by one of David's generals.

David deeply grieves his son. His hopes and dreams were for a kingdom that honored God. His hopes and dreams for his family were that they would get along, honor and respect one another and work to establish the kingdom that God promised together. But these hopes and dreams would not come to pass. Many of David's hopes and dreams would come to pass in his son, Solomon. But that's next week's story.

This week we are left grieving with David; just as many of us grieve over poor decisions or a lack of decision in our own families. We too had hoped for our families to get along. We too had hoped that everyone in the family

would desire God's kingdom to come first, just as we hope and pledge ourselves to do, week by week, moment by moment. But instead, we have family conflict, family secrets, family sins; many of us experience this, over and over. We had hoped that our marriages would be conflict free or better in many ways than what we have experienced as children watching our parents. We had hoped that our children and grandchildren would have chosen some of the spiritual priorities that we have chosen in our lives. But alas, such did not come to pass. We can blame ourselves. We can blame God. We can blame our children and grandchildren. But in the end, what we need to do and be is a part of the solution and not the problem.

We need to recommit to our own spiritual choices and paths, because we cannot control others' choices. Perhaps we don't like to hear that, but it is true that we don't have the control or influence over others that perhaps we might have thought at one time.

We can only choose ourselves to pray, to read Scripture, to worship day by day and include God at our meals, in our business, in our studies and research, in our recreation and holidays, throughout our lives. We cannot make these choices for others. The influence that we do have may only be related to the fact God is working in our lives. We can share about what God is doing in our lives; not telling others what God should be doing in their lives. There it is.

This is not to say we shouldn't have hopes and dreams anymore because they always end up in loss and grief. We should be encouraged in our hopes and dreams. I have my hopes and dreams for this congregation, for this property which I have shared from this pulpit. I believe you have them as well. Perhaps we can develop a forum or a committee to share these hopes and dreams, whether or not they come into reality.

I have my hopes and dreams for my family, my extended family and others in my life; long time friends and neighbors and so on. It's hard to find a safe place to share these dreams because I too have been hurt when I have tried to share what is close to my heart. Perhaps you have had the same experience.

So we relate to David in terms of what he longed for. Yet we see what was happening in reality, partly influenced by his own sins; partly influenced by others' sins and rebellion. So many individuals seem out of control, whether by addictions, or money/career making, consumerism, powerful aspirations,

personal dominations, you can probably add to the list of why you think people lose control of their lives.

Each of us is called to manage our own dreams and hopes. Each of us is called to manage our own losses and grief. For me, I tell myself if one hope or dream will not come true, then perhaps it is time for new hopes and dreams. This way the hopes and dreams that become losses and grief can continue in an upward spiral of new hopes and dreams, some of which, will be fulfilled. The highest vertical of that spiral will culminate when we are in the presence of the Lord, when we experience the vital, active lifestyle of heaven.

Each of us must consider how we manage our internal and spiritual processes. As we do so in the hope of the Lord, trusting God, knowing Jesus through all the highs and lows of life, we experience the faithfulness of God and the mercy of God. Life isn't what we expected. But we can still learn and we can face the future, one day at a time with the grace and power of God all around us.

Let us pray.