

Let us pray: Heavenly God, I pray that you would make your presence among us felt this morning. As we celebrate, and as we remember, be with us. Open our ears and our hearts to be receptive to your call, and may we have the courage to change and learn to follow you more and more each day. Amen.

There is a famous question, asked by the 2nd century Christian author Tertullian: “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” As Roman influence grew, and the Christian Church became more involved with greek philosophy and culture, this question came to define much of the debate around the place of Christianity within a surrounding culture.

Today, as we celebrate Canada day, I have another question: What has Ottawa to do with St. David’s? Or to ask the same question a bit more directly, what does our government and our nation have to do with our faith? There has been a lot of pride poured into our country’s 150th anniversary celebration, but it has also been an anniversary marked by uncertainty and frustration. Indigenous protesters raised a teepee on Parliament hill, frustrated at the government’s treatment of their people. It seems hard to deny their frustration, given the reality that in 2017, some reserves have been under boil water advisories for more than two decades. When we consider the history of our nation as a whole, warts and all, it seems a little difficult to celebrate. Many Canadians have asked: can we honestly glorify this country with such a celebration?

The question of nationalism also affects churches. For many presbyterian churches in Canada, there is a strong sense of Scottish national pride. The most common name for Presbyterian churches in Canada must be St. Andrew’s, named after the patron saint of Scotland.

Many churches will have Robbie Burns suppers, and maybe even a kirking of the tartan service, where displays are made of the various clan tartans by those present. And today, as we sing our national and provincial anthem, and I wave a giant Canadian flag around in front of the children, I think it's fair to say that we have had a pretty Canadian service.

But what has our country to do with our worship? The church's answer to this question has changed over time, and continues to be shaped today. As we remember the sacrifice of Newfoundland at Beaumont Hamel, I'm reminded of a book review I did in seminary, of a book titled "Canadian Churches and the First World War", edited by Gordon L. Heath. In the chapter on the Presbyterian response, one Knox College student for ministry from Toronto, who was enlisted in the army, wrote back to his fellow seminarians that the Great War was "a local phase of the world wide struggle against evil and injustice which you are training to enter." Elsewhere, it was recorded that the Presbyterian stance was that God would "Not allow Satan, or Kaiser, to overthrow his Kingdom". And in fact, Canada's national motto, "A mari usque ad mare", "From sea to sea" is an excerpt from Psalm 72, which we read this morning: "And he shall have dominion from sea to sea". Now, I know that back in those days, Newfoundland was not a part of Canada, and this church wasn't Presbyterian, but this kind of rhetoric was quite commonplace.

So what do we think of all this *now*, in this day and age? What does the bible have to say about Canada, and about our celebration of today? What does Ottawa have to do with St. David's? Our reading from Romans this morning offers us an answer: from verse 16: " Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death,

or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.”

There are many dominions which lay claim to our greatest loyalty: The Dominion of Canada, the Dominion of Newfoundland, the dominion of sin. But ultimately, there is only one loyalty that leads us to life, and that is the dominion of Christ, the kingdom of God.

We are, first and foremost, citizens of that kingdom. Our greatest celebration is when we come together each week on Sunday to celebrate that kingdom together, celebrating the lives that we have been given by grace, lives full of plenty, full of security and peace. We celebrate the life that God has given us today.

When we celebrate Canada day, this is a part what we are celebrating too: our good fortune this year, to be living in a country in which we can feel free and at peace. These are gifts of God in our lives; it has been, for me, a gift to live in Canada. It is a gift to live in a country which has provided me with so much, with an education I could afford, and with health care for Michelle and I. It is an amazing privilege to be having our baby here; there are so many people in the world who face much greater risks in childbirth. Our country is connected to our faith by the reality that it is a blessing for us to live here, and it is important that we remember that, and to remember what it cost to bring us here.

And at the same time, I believe Canada is also our mission field. We are members of this country, and it is within our power to influence our community for good or for ill. We celebrate Canada day because of the vision we have for this great country: we celebrate the hope we have that all people would have clean water to drink and a home to live in, that no-

one would starve or suffer oppression. These are not all realities in Canada, but we celebrate that hope, as we hear God's call to work together for the good of the land we have been planted in. Our faith leads us to bless our country. We also remember the sadness of the past to guide us in our future, we remember with sadness and work never again to repeat the horrors of our past.

What has Ottawa to do with St. David's? First, we recognize and rejoice that God blesses us through this country, and second, we accept that God's mission leads us to seek a bright future for our country. As we celebrate Canada day, let us never forget that our truest allegiance is as subjects of the King of Heaven. Our greatest devotion is due to God. We work that devotion out in this world, in St. John's, in Newfoundland, in Canada, as we seek to shine the light of God for all to see. We rejoice to be living in Canada by the grace of God, and we hope to see it transformed as part of the new heaven and new earth. We celebrate the blessings that God has given us each and every day. In closing, my dear friends, never forget: the dominion of Canada may offer free health care, but the Kingdom of God offers everlasting life. What good news it is that we get both. Hallelujah, and Amen.