

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Our Identity/Our Mission"
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Even if you're not a sports fan, you probably will have taken some note of the Olympics going on the last couple of weeks. Every four years, the planet gets together and does these higher, faster, stronger, farther games. The sports themselves may not be very interesting, but the individuals and teams pursuing them are quite fascinating, at least to me.

These are people who have put four, eight, twelve, sixteen, twenty and more years into their sports. Ian Miller is still on his horse at age 61. Consider these examples: the American woman who got a silver medal in the pool at the age of 41, who was the oldest eight years ago to get a gold medal in the pool, eight years ago; or the fourteen year old diver who is legally competing from the 10 meter platform.

There is a great amount of focus and dedication in the Olympic athletes. Whether they get gold, or another medal or whether they cannot even complete their event due to an injury or a difficulty, or whether they rank high or low, they have set their sights on a high goal and have gone after it.

It was interesting to hear the Canadian runners particularly talking about how they have to run their race, keep their focus on their pace, not looking to the left and to the right, but doing what they know they can do.

The Scriptures speak of our faith as a race in Hebrews. Each of us prepares and runs the race everyday, whether we have ever run competitively or not. We run the race of trusting God in our relationships and everyday passions and concerns. We run the race in speaking to others of the hope that we have within us. We run the race in the midst of our losses, our difficulties, our joys.

The trust we place in God develops at different times for different individuals. Many of us have had good input from a young age regarding the Gospel of Jesus Christ, loving Him, following Him, trusting Him. Others of us have only had an opportunity in our later years to trust Him. But all of us have today to do so. That's why we come here. That's why we

have this Table today to remember and experience our relationship to Him anew.

Each of us, like Moses, has had the attention of God on our lives. From the very moment of our conception to right now, God knows what is going on. He knew the political atmosphere in Egypt when Moses was born. His parents trusted God, not aborting him, and the same with the midwives, not killing him when they had seen the soldiers doing so to other infants. They gave him up to God, as we must give our children to the Lord. They abandoned him to the river, which was a gut wrenching choice. He was found by the Pharaoh's daughter and became a prince. You've heard the story.

Life is full of contradictions and crazy decisions. Moses shouldn't have made it through his infancy, if you were betting on all the circumstances he faced. Perhaps there are circumstances that you have faced where it appeared you shouldn't have survived it either. But here you are. And just like Moses, God has a plan and a destiny for you. Just one person like you can make a huge difference, in your family, in your local community, in your congregation, in your city, in your province, in your nation, in your world. Moses changed the international scene forever. God can use you to do the same. And even if it is only changing your family or friends, that can have generations of lasting change in it.

The Psalmist gives thanks to God in Psalm 124 for rescuing us from traps, from the rage of others, from weather disasters, from wild animals (literally and figuratively). He sings about the grace and faithfulness of God, and praises God with his song.

Paul encourages us to present our very physical bodies to God, our selves to God, as a way to say everyday that God is truly our manager, our director, our coach, our source, our life, our centre. He knows that it takes time and energy, our choice to become more focused in our Christian commitment. We need to use the same kind of commitment and energy in our faith and trusting of God as the Olympic athletes put into their sports events.

Paul suggests we renew our minds, by listening to God's perspective as it is found in Scripture, by taking time to apply what we learn to our thinking, and world view and everyday living. Our goal as Christians is to find out what pleases the Lord, what is God's definition of 'good,' God's definition

of 'acceptable,' God's definition of 'mature,' (not 'perfect,' (NRSV) but 'mature' or 'complete').

Paul strikes at our pride, when he says that we are not supposed to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. There is more to God's work here on earth than you and I. But at the same time it is you and I that are called to do God's work. That's why God gives us spiritual gifts to build up the church, and build the community. Speaking from God's point of view, showing compassion in the community, giving generously, showing love as we receive love from God. All these human choices build up what God is in the business of doing.

You and I need to choose. Matthew records Jesus asking his disciples about his identity. Because if we get the identity of Jesus wrong, all our religious and spiritual commitments and attitudes will flow from that error. But if we understand Jesus to rightly be the One He says He is and demonstrates He is, then we are on the right track.

Everyone has guesses about who Jesus is. The crowds and individuals had them during Jesus' time on earth as well as people do today. Who do you say that Jesus is? That's the key spiritual question for today, right now.

God builds on your response to that key question, just as God built His Church on Peter's response, not on Peter, not on me, not on you. How you respond in your identity as a person in relationship to Jesus Christ is key to your mission in life, and to being the Church.

We love rocks in Newfoundland, I do at least. What is the rock solid image that Jesus is teaching in this passage in Matthew? Is it that Peter is rock solid? No, we know he denies Christ at a pivotal moment. It is his correct response about Jesus being the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Son of the Living God, and being in right relationship with this One person. Jesus is the Rock, the solid foundation for living life God's way.

This one person gives us life, spiritual life. This one person gives us authority: an authority to offer this same relationship to others. That is the binding and the loosing, the loosing or releasing of relationship to the Living God and the binding is saying that you stay in your sins if you choose against Jesus.

The Table today is your way to say, “Yes” unconditionally to Jesus. It is a place to renew your sense of mission in life, even if you don't understand why you are still alive. It means offering that life back to Jesus for his purposes and ways. It means finding your identity in the One who created your life and the universe.

Who do you say Jesus is? On the confession of your faith, and your commitment to live it out, Jesus builds his church.

Let us come to the Table today, let us choose to give ourselves completely and unreservedly to Jesus. As we do, we receive all we need to live day by day with purpose for Him.

Let us pray.