

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Divine Love That Calms"
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Proper 9

After seeming weeks of cold drizzle and fog, what a joy it is to be able to see the blue sky, to feel the warmth of the sun on your face and to enjoy sitting outside with a gentle cool breeze. To listen to the birds, to see the insects in their busy ways, to drink in the colors of the garden and the rich greens of the season, such is experiencing a deep calm and a reassuring warmth.

Such moments capture what we long for in life. They touch something deep inside us that God has placed within us, if we but stop and enjoy the moment. But even in the summer, our frantic, noisy lifestyles are difficult to shed.

If we do focus on the moment, then we have a chance to receive a taste of the divine love for which we were made. It is not a strange or remote thing for us to speak of our need for God's love, because we were created for love. We taste of this love through our mothers, then our fathers and as we are given grace, we are introduced to Jesus Christ, the center of history.

Jesus is the one who likens humanity in Matthew 11 to the teens of his day who would get together at the shopping mall and talk about how their expectations in life were not being fulfilled. They would say something like, "I bought you an Xbox and a Wii but you didn't want to play them. We bought you the hottest new CDs and DVDs, but you didn't want to listen or watch them."

What he meant was that God always is surprising us with His message and His simplicity. Jesus gave the example of John the Baptizer who was an ascetic, that is, a person who renounces the comforts of society and leads a life of austere self-discipline, (although he did enjoy the occasional roasted locust.)

So Jesus says that John chose to not allow himself any comforts, but was accused of being strange, of having a demon, even though he did not. Jesus, on the other hand, chose to go to the parties and hang out with people of low or negative reputation. Jesus was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard, even though he was neither.

So the Lord taught that everyone who has a ministry or even associates themselves with God's kingdom and God's ways will be maligned and accused in some way. Such is life. But wisdom will be evaluated in the end by the Wise One, in light of what we have done, even more than what we have said.

And there will be surprises. Those most learned, those who feel themselves intellectually superior to those around them may have the greatest challenge in the end because God often chooses a way that is easier, easy enough and straightforward for a child or an infant to grasp.

That way is the way of relationship. It is the sunny moment in the garden with the fragrance of lilac or lily. Jesus tells us again, that it is only by grace that we can receive what God gives us. Even as we have once again baptized a child and an infant before they can even confess the faith, we receive them and encourage them to make a commitment in their young lives as soon as they have ability and maturity to do so. The grace comes first, then the choice of relationship is offered again.

Here is what Jesus offers. He does not offer power, or wealth, or influence or reputation or even perfect health. He offers Himself.

And that divine love which flows from Himself is the easy yoke, and the light burden. He's not saying life will be easy once you've given yourself to God. He's not saying He will take all our responsibilities away from us and make life choices so clear and easy that we won't even have to think. He is saying that His love will come along side us and bear the load, shoulder the pain and suffering, lighten the sting of grief, because His life and love and light warm us and sustain us.

Such love is incomparable, even though the Scripture spends a great deal of time giving symbolic examples of love that would give us a taste of the divine love. We see that in the Genesis 24 where the unnamed servant of Abraham is charged with finding a bride for Isaac, the miracle child. An arranged marriage may sound strange to our ears, but it still takes place in many cultures across the planet. What we find in this story is a man trying to please his master and his God by finding just the right young woman for the young crown prince Isaac. He sets up a number of requests to God, detailed requests that would assure that the young woman would have a

heart for hospitality and caring for visitors. He also actually asks her whether she is in agreement with the request of Abraham on behalf of his son. This was rare in these ancient times, where women were still considered more property than persons. But God is gracious to the servant, to Rebekah, to Isaac and their two families. The love of God is shown through this arranged marriage, that God cares about the details of our lives. He wants to be involved in our heart's cry for a spouse, and even in a detailed way, as you ask God for His best for you and the one with whom you might spend the rest of your life.

In Psalm 45, we hear in another love story the faithfulness and love of God. Here we find words addressed to the bride of the king. We hear these words overlaid with the words of Paul, which remind us that the Church is the bride of the King of Kings. We hear anew in our love stories the love story of God wooing believers to Himself. I hope that you can recount God's faithfulness to you in your love stories, whether very old or very new. Here we hear God at work, reminding us not only of human love but also of God's faithful toward us throughout our whole lives.

Finally, in Romans, we realize again with Paul that we are fickle toward God and others in our sinful nature. We who call ourselves Christian find ourselves straying from our calling, rebelling against God and choosing our own way rather than the Lord's. It seems our human nature has a lot of Frank Sinatra's "I did it my way" in us. "My way or the highway," some of us might think to ourselves in our bolder moments. But such a spiritual battle does rage within us, and unless we continue to give ourselves fully and completely to God, we tend to go our own sinful way.

So today is another day to say to God, "Lord, I forsake my way, I choose your way. Direct me in your love. Teach me your truth. Calm me with the peace that passes understanding."

When you give yourself to God, and when you give your children, your spouse, your parents, your grandparents, your grandchildren, your great-grandchildren to the Lord, you know you are on the right path. In God's hands, we have a chance to lighten our loads, to know the strength and encouragement of Jesus, to come out from the shame of our sin and the pride of our rebellion. We come into the calming love of God.

Paul in Philippians talks about the peace that passes understanding. Not only does it defy intellectual description, but it guards our hearts, the centre of who we are and our minds which processes our thoughts and prayers.

As you are able to take time this summer in the garden, at the ocean, in the woods, or just in your backyard, I hope you can quiet yourself and re-read some of these passages of Scripture so that you can truly know how much God really does love you. In those moments, we have a spiritual summer, that no change of the weather can ever take away.

Let us pray.