

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"Gains and Losses"  
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October 2, 2011  
World Communion Sunday

While the politicians are scrutinizing their gains and losses through the leadership and other debates this week; we wonder again at own gains and losses. We have lost friends, family members, people who are now far away, but not deceased. We have lost time, track of time, lost dreams, sometimes lost hope, lost more than we could imagine.

Jesus was also facing his losses as he drank the cup in the upper room on the night before his death. "Can you drink the cup that I am about drink?" he had asked his disciples, who wished to be promoted. Drinking the cup was a symbol of complete commitment, even to death, of following through with his mission. As we drink from the small individual cups at the Lord's Table here, we ask ourselves the same question: "Am I willing to be completely committed to Jesus' cause here in this city and beyond?" And we say, "Yes, God, with you helping me." And we drink. Not because we are so good, and so worthy and so powerful.

It is because we know our weaknesses and sins, at least some of them. We know them from the ten commandments, which Jesus says if we even imagine ourselves doing these sins, then we are guilty. The Law reminds us we are all guilty. The grace found in Jesus Christ says we are forgiven when we accept what he has done for us that we cannot do for ourselves, as those found guilty by the heavenly court. We are found not guilty because of what Jesus has done.

And the journey continues. We have relationship with God as a gift, simply received, simply continued. Just as we take the bread and the grape juice. Simply received.

Our losses are many. But our gains are many as well. In this season of Thanksgiving between the blueberry harvest and American Thanksgiving, we again need to take time to say "thank you" to God for the many gifts we have. This too is a simple exercise, yet like physical exercise, many of us neglect it. So we take a moment now. We say "thank you for our health, our strength, the ability to choose to be here, for our mental acuity, for our friends here, for good music, for a place to call 'home', for work, for money

enough to live, for the arts, for the university, for people who care...the list goes on, and normally we take time at the end of the service for such, but today with communion, I am taking the time now. Take the time to say, "Thank you" to God, today, this week.

Paul took the time to write the church at Philippi, which was experiencing disagreements and disunity of various kinds. One of the areas may have been in the area of the reputation and breeding of the leaders, pastors and teachers. There were other teachers and leaders vying for power in the new church, many for selfish gain. So Paul lists his pedigree. He talks about his educational background, his religious background, and how flawless he was in zeal for his faith, enough to even put Christians in jail and worse.

But he gave up his rights and pride in regard to his pedigree and social status, whether racial, or political, or economic, or academic, all the reasons why he should be respected, he gave them up. He experienced them as a loss, not a right. And in many areas in our lives, we need to do the same. We may think that we have the right to be highly respected and looked up to. But the fact is that our greatest place of honour is in the presence of the One who gave up everything and calls us to service.

That's why Paul can even say that his highest credentials are now just garbage, or even stronger language in the original, "poop" compared to his relationship to the Lord. Our spiritual life is the place where life flows or where we turn away from life and grasp garbage in our central identifying of ourselves. It seems like such a simple choice: choose between life giving water or garbage. But we lose focus, and everyday can become a garbage day. On the day the garbage truck comes, it seems that your garbage, your recycling, your cardboard boxes broken down become the focus of your attention.

It can be that way in our lives. We lose the focus on God. We lose focus on our mission before God. We forget we are ambassadors for Christ wherever we are. And boom. Garbage day is here again.

Paul experienced this too. That's why he said he needed to take time to know Christ, and the power of his resurrection. To know Jesus, we need to study what the Scripture says about him. We need to reveal ourselves to him and let him reveal himself to us.

On the resurrection power side of things, it is not just trusting Jesus in the midst of facing our own deaths. This in itself is a huge project, facing our own deaths, lest we belittle how large this can loom in our hearts. But even more than trusting the Lord for the eventuality of losing this body and this existence, we need to trust God for the power to meet each day, to not lose hope, to not be overwhelmed by the losses and challenges, but to trust God anew to be with us, to be for us, to strengthen us to keep our eyes open, our ears open, and our hearts open to what God is doing through us.

We may or may not be famous in the world's eyes. Some of us are famous here. In the end, along with Paul, we simply let what has happened in the past slip away, and look forward to the prize of seeing Jesus face to face, of knowing God's physical presence, not just his spiritual presence that we have now. Just as a runner running a race sees the finish line, so we long for the wholeness of the next life, because this one has been so broken. And through it all, we remember that we belong to Jesus. We are his. He is ours.

That one fact we should remember every time at his table. We should recall his torture to death, not because we like images or movies rated 18+ or not, but because we remember that he did not shy away from the cup that came his way. He calls us to the same. He calls us to service. His service led to his being tortured to death.

You know last week I mentioned we are looking for new elders to lead here. It is good to know you have a relationship with the Lord. It is good to know that you want to serve the church and give more time and energy to the place you call your spiritual home. Now we simply need to confirm those good desires in your heart. Because it is not just about how you feel, but about how others feel about you in this place. The Lord uses the community to confirm what our gifts are and how God wants to use those gifts in deeper ways.

It's hard to lead. If you have ever led any group or committee, you know some of the challenges. It would be a lie to say otherwise. It takes more time and energy than you think. But like every challenge, there are rewards. With every service that costs you, you receive. In fact, as I say, perhaps too often, you only get keep what you give away.

We give ourselves away, back to Jesus, at his table. Millions are joining with us at his table today. Let us not shy away, but generously give

ourselves, our lives, our desires, our dreams, our hopes, our plans to the Lord.

Let us pray.