

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Sticky Issues: Shaken and Stirred"
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Welcome to another edition of "Sticky Issues in the Summer." Last week we spoke about the difficult subject of unresolved conflict. This week we look being shaken and stirred. You will note that this is not about James Bond's recipe for a perfect martini, depending on the Bond.

This is about times in our lives when we are shaken, and other times when we are stirred. When, for example, has your faith recently been shaken? When has it been stirred up?

Jesus had the uncanny ability to be able to confront the comfortable and comfort the afflicted. He is seen in Luke 13 healing a woman who was experiencing back problems and couldn't stand up straight. We don't know what age of a woman she was except that she had been experiencing this debilitating condition for at least eighteen years. So she probably wasn't very young. We also know that she had been attending worship throughout that time, despite whatever pain level she endured. It doesn't take too much imagination to think about what internal conversations she might have been having. She was wondering if she should come to worship anymore, because the prayers and worship had not healed her. She might have had her faith shaken by the fact that she had probably asked the Lord over and over to remove this terrible burden and suffering from her life. But it hadn't happened. How about you? Is there something in your life like this? What strategies do you employ to deal with your burden and/or suffering?

Again, we will give you healing prayer whenever you ask, prayer of faith, anointing with oil, the laying on of hands and keep doing so with you, as you ask and as God directs.

Jesus simply lays his hands on her and she is freed from her long term disability. Luke as a physician is once again amazed. And you and I can only begin to imagine the freedom she experienced. She immediately began to praise God, something that may have been difficult for her for many years. Her shaken faith was stirred by the power of the Son of God. Is there some touch of God, some healing that you hang onto when the hard times come?

Back to worship. You would think that the leaders of the worship service and those around Jesus would rejoice with her. But instead there was a negative reaction. How dare you do such a thing on the day of rest! This was such an act of worship by Jesus on the day of worship, but nevertheless the negative reactions still came.

And so Jesus confronts the worship leader about the day of rest. He tells him that it is hypocritical to treat your animals and your pets better than those coming to worship. Shouldn't we all rejoice when a person is set free from a debilitating condition, rather than worrying about the day of the week?

Now many of you can remember the days when you weren't allow to do anything but go to church on Sunday. Some of you were forbidden to even play games or cards on that day, let alone shopping, sports or just going to work another day. We live in an era that hardly remembers that era. But many of you do remember it. The reality is that we do need a day off a week, at a minimum. And when we do not take a day off a week, it effects our health, our well-being, our spirituality and our sense of who we are. So it is not that Jesus is against the Sabbath, against the principle of resting a day in the week. Jesus is certainly not against having one day to worship God set aside in the week. But he is trying to give perspective.

And he is trying to do the same with us. Sometimes the smallest religious matters take center stage over the more important matters. The clergy in Jesus' time would tithe the spices from their gardens but engage in questionable financial practices and unjust behaviour against the poor. So he would confront them, not to not tithe, but to put this in perspective against larger issues.

We too are living in a time when spiritual and religious questions seem to be bowled over by social and relativistic tendencies. What I mean is that we live in age that despises religious or spiritual truth claims. Whenever someone puts forward something about the person of Jesus, for example, the answer back might something like, that's fine for you, but has nothing to do with me.

For if our faith is being shaken and stirred, those who do not know what they believe are experiencing this in an exponential way. The author of the book

of Hebrews explicitly brings us into the presence of God and says that this experience is no light matter.

He uses words and images to conjure the strongest video or movie we can imagine ourselves in. In fact, you would think that the images used are more about a nightmare than about the presence of God. You're on a mountain hike, and it becomes dark, there is a storm approaching quickly, there is nothing to be touched, and it is like fire in the sky, but not light, the audio is like a trumpet blast, and the words once they come are so difficult to take in that the people there are begging to hear no more. This was actually a description of what the people said when Moses was going up the mountain to be with God to receive the Ten Commandments. It was the mountain of fear. (Hebrews 12: 18 -21)

In contrast, the mountain of joy is where the people assemble because of the grace and love brought to them by Jesus. Yet the author does not want his audience to become complacent. This is the same God who shakes the earth with his voice. And even the heavens are shaken similarly. So when our lives are shaken up, where do we go? What happens to our faith, our trust in God through the hardest times?

The author to the Hebrews tells us that we who have trusted in Jesus have received inside ourselves the kingdom of God which cannot be shaken. So he concludes this dramatic passage with a call to what? Do you remember? Verse 28 of chapter 12 of Hebrews: So be thankful. And I still have much to learn about being thankful, about being content, about verbalizing gratitude and staying in the season of Thanksgiving all year round. This is my one mission. And he continues "worship God with reverence and awe." That's the fear of the Lord, which really means "a heart felt devotion to God and a commitment to God's priorities in my life." When you read the "fear of the Lord" in the Old or New Testament, understand it this way. There is some shaking in our boots when we confront the Living God, but really it is more about devotion and inclining our hearts against rebellion and toward agreement with the Lord and taking action in line with what we say we believe.

Then it doesn't matter how old we are. Like Jeremiah, the teenage prophet, who says he is a youth and doesn't know how to even says things that will properly bring forward God's message. To this young man, and to many others among us, God says, Don't say I'm too young or too old, but rather

know that I am giving you the words to say, powerful words, powerful enough to destroy kingdoms and nations, powerful enough to plant and build. The power is not in the messenger but in the message of the One sends you and who is with you.

We don't have to be ashamed of what we believe, the Psalmist says in Psalm 71. God is our hope and trust. There is more going on in our communities, in our personal lives, in our families, in our churches and other gatherings, than what meets the eye.

Be careful to invest in that which cannot go down, rust or be stolen or destroyed. Invest in God's way, and you will not be disappointed. But when you are disappointed, when you are shaken in your faith, when you cannot make sense of what is going on, simply say that to the God who hears and understands.

God knows. I don't. I do know our trust, that is, our faith in God can be stirred whether we see miracles or not. Let us trust our God anew this day and give ourselves anew to God.

Let us pray.