

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"The Father's Business in 2010"
Dr. J. Dent

December 27, 2009
1st Sunday after Christmas

Life is an adventure. How we choose to experience that adventure is something for which God gives us choice and decisions. The attitudes we choose to cultivate, whether gratitude or rights, whether presumption or anticipation of surprises is up to us.

Even the little Samuel, the little David and the little Jesus had choices as boys. Little Samuel could have felt abandoned by his mother to the work of the Temple and the work of God. Little David could have felt isolated in being with the sheep while his brothers were at the feast with the adult Samuel. Little Jesus could have gone on and on about how his parents didn't understand him and how special he was. But none of these apparently took on a victim mentality. None of them focused on the terrible parts of their lives, as far as we know. They simply went about the Father's Business, which was their calling from God.

We don't really know too too much about the childhoods of any of the famous characters of the Bible. But let me suggest to you that each of these three boys chose to trust God and take life as an adventure, rather than as something to dread or despise. Each one had a mission from God. Each one knew something of the love and grace of God, even as we do.

And so as we face another new year, each of us once again faces many surprises as we seek to answer God's calling to each one of us. Rather than a resolution this year, perhaps we can take time to listen for that calling. We cannot control the challenges and difficulties of the new year. We can choose to grow in our spiritual lives. We can choose to pay attention to the mission God has for each of us, in our families, in our friendships, in our workplaces, in our city. Each of us has a unique place where we serve, whether working or retired, whether in recreation or at home. We all touch many lives. The question is: what impact will we have on others in 2010? Will it be for good?

We cannot control how others react to us. But we can choose once again to consider how we might improve our own lives. We often talk about New Year's resolutions. Sometimes these concern our health, our exercise, our

diet, our reading, our volunteering, our recreation, our mental disposition, many, many kinds of things. Resolutions usually do not last. And so if you were to read what I suggested last year regarding daily prayer and Bible readings, you would have to check and see if anything has changed in the last 12 months. So let me suggest something different this year.

I've already suggested it in one of our times together. The suggestion is this: That you choose a small group outside of Sunday morning that meets weekly where you might grow in your faith, share more of yourself and your life and be open to be challenged to change for the better. There are already many groups that meet here in the church on a monthly, or biweekly basis, and some that meet weekly, on most days of the week.

The question really is whether we want to incorporate this part of our lives and give the time needed to make this a reality. We all know we need community and friends to support us. We all need love and we all need a place to be encouraged and supported. Sometimes we choose church for this need. Sometimes we choose other community groups for this need.

We need a place that the Apostle Paul was describing to the Colossians. This group would be a place where we give and receive forgiveness, give and exchange loving friendship, and experience peace as we have the freedom to be real and authentic.

Paul also suggests we have a place where the Scripture can influence us positively, so that we might build each other up, not argue nor tear down but a place where we can be thankful together and encourage each other. Sometimes 12 step groups function for individuals to experience this (even most AA and Al-anon groups begin with the Serenity prayer and end with the Lord's Prayer). Sometimes Bible Studies function for individuals to experience this.

I once again want to emphasize that if we can help you find the group you need, please tell me or one of the elders. We want to facilitate as much personal and group spiritual growth as we can here. If I can help by starting a group or someone else can, please talk to me or that person.

We all need to choose again how we will receive the gift of another New Year. It's hard to believe it is 2010 in just a few days, but it is. There is no question as to whether there will be surprises coming our way this year.

There will be surprises. The question continues to be: How will we choose to encounter those surprises? Will it be with fear and anxiety? Will it be with love and peace and joy and hope? Will it be in our own strength and wisdom? Or will we invite God into our decision making in a very conscious way?

One of the big surprises that has come across my desk in the last few weeks is that I was nominated for the position of the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. This is the highest honour that we bestow upon individuals in the national church, in our denomination. There are three candidates, Herb Gale, who was here in the Fall leading our Elders' Retreat, who works at the national offices and Patricia Dutcher-Walls, who teaches Old Testament at the Vancouver School of Theology and me. All the representative elders to the presbyteries and Ministers across the country vote for the person who becomes Moderator and the results are announced on April 1 (which is probably quite appropriate at least in my case).

If I am elected I will lead the weeklong meeting this June which happens to be in Cape Breton. I'd also be asked to travel on behalf of the church and would be away quite a bit for a year. The elders and I have spoken about this and we would make sure someone would be here taking care of the congregation. The presbytery and the elders fully support me in allowing my name to stand for this position. All of this has been quite a surprise for me, and I wanted to give some warning, just in case this happens. Of course, only one person serves and both Herb and Pat are excellent candidates. There is no running of a campaign, there is only a vote and maybe an article in the national magazine, the Record.

Well, adventures happen and surprises happen when you are least looking for them. I am moved by the majority votes of the three presbyteries that put forth my name for this honour. I am also aware of my unworthiness to take up the high office.

Each of us, everyone here, will have personal surprises this year. It is important for everyone of us to be listening for how we are to respond to these surprises. God tells us to give thanks, even when the surprise is a loss or something we perceive to be quite negative.

So as we look forward to the New Year. Let us trust the God who always brings us surprises. Let us look for God's guidance as we see the adventure stretch out before us.

Let us pray.