

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
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February 6, 2011  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

*More Foolishness and Weakness to Boot*

The elders and the Board met yesterday to consider the future of our congregation. Now this is not because we are having problems but because we want to grow and focus our energies in such a way that you receive the maximum benefit, and that you have a place to give of yourself and your resources to best benefit the whole church. Like so much of life, it's about give and take.

We struggle with deciding what we should be doing. We want to encourage our youth and children, but we struggle with knowing how to do this. The Presbytery intends to hire a full time Youth Minister and we look forward to this. But what can we do to help each other help each other; re youth now and the many other segments of the congregation...

The leaders here struggle as much with this as any one who comes here on a Sunday or any other day of the week. We wonder how we can help our young families as they seek to love their children and help their children know God, as well as know God themselves and love God.

It wouldn't be a surprise to you that the leaders struggle as much as you do with time commitments, health, giving time to God and God's ways in the community beyond work, priorities in retirement, how much is too much and how much is not enough... In all these things the leaders struggle just like you do to try and figure out how to use our time wisely, how to use our money wisely and thank God we have both.

We want to encourage families here and build better relationships both with each other and with God. And we will be looking for your input to do just this. It's not that our families as leaders are any better than yours. We struggle in probably all the same ways you do. Many of us have both generations above us and below us who need our help. Many of us feel at times like it is all a bit too much to handle.

So we come to worship to gain a new perspective from God, to be refreshed, to take a deep breath, and to hear again that we are loved, and that there is no

magic formula. The only core relationship is that with Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Paul went to great lengths to say this to the Corinthian church. Much like today, the Corinthian Christians were constantly looking for the newest and best thing on the market. They were looking for wisdom... sophisticated words that would wow them and move them. Paul admitted he didn't have either the vocabulary or the rhetorical skill to wow them. He simply talked about giving themselves totally to God in Jesus. He knew many people thought it was simply foolishness to talk about a man who had been tortured to death on a cross that had been raised back to life and turned out to be God Himself who had lived a completely human life. Paul knew what people were saying both to his face and behind his back.

But Paul chose the way of truth and also chose to reveal it no matter how foolish it sounded. He was an honest man who worked hard to make sure people understood that being a Christian didn't make you automatically an amazing debater, orator or even someone who is easy to get along with. It makes you face the truth about yourself, your strengths, your weaknesses, your sins, your gifts, all of it together.

This is in part why Paul can say in verse 3 of chapter 2 of 1 Corinthians that he didn't come to show perfection or even to entertain. He came simply with simple truths like honesty and integrity. He was able to tell them that he came to them not able to speak well publicly (possibly because of his Greek language being a second or third or fourth language). He wanted people to know that he was nervous, even trembling when trying to teach and preach.

I'm the same way. I don't have all the answers or even all the questions. I have some education and some experience, but everywhere is different, everyone needs something a little different. We all need love and truth. If we could keep these in balance, we would be doing very well indeed.

Verses 4 and 5 tell us that Paul mainly wanted to share his experience of the power of God to transform people. He experienced it himself on the Damascus Road, when he was going to imprison people in the church, and Jesus told him to go another way and allowed him to lose his sight for a few days. Later on, he saw people healed later through him and raised from the

dead. God was doing powerful works of transformation in people's lives. God still does transformational works in our lives today.

This is where the wisdom of God comes in. It is not the words or the vocabulary but a real encounter with the Divine. It is a personal experience of the One who knows us and loves us. This is the heart of the secret wisdom of God, an open secret, one that anyone in any church should be able to hear any Sunday.

We know that not everyone will agree with this nor will they even be calm in listening to words about Jesus. There will always be opposition to the message about who Jesus is. As Paul says, if the politicians of his day had understood only a little about Jesus, they certainly would not have tortured him to death. But they didn't understand and many today do not understand who he is either.

Not only do many misunderstand Jesus, they also misunderstand Paul. They believe he hated women by telling them to submit to their husbands and for slaves to submit to their masters. But I think if you give a fair reading to Paul throughout his letters you will find a balance that those who criticize Paul do not find. Paul told the men to give themselves up for their wives as Christ gave himself for the church. If the man were as giving and loving as Jesus, the submitting and respecting part would take care of itself. And remember Paul was the one who wrote to Philemon about his run away slave Onesimus, telling the slave owner to treat his slave as a brother and as a friend because he had given his life to Christ, so he indeed was a brother.

I have found Paul to be way more mutual in his teachings on relationships and egalitarian than most people give him credit. In his day and age, women, children and slaves were possessions, not persons. I find he goes against the spirit of his age and finds a way forward that leads to today's mutual respect, personhood, and a deep sense of valuing both sexes, all socio-economic levels, all races, and what God is doing across the planet. But of course we have a long ways to go and this life will always be marked by sin.

Yet in spite of this fact, Paul mentions to us in verse 9 that we need to look forward to that time when we will be face to face with the Lord. Heaven is an existence that no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no heart has conceived how good it will be to finally know the love of God, both loving God and

being loved by God face to face. We cannot imagine the wonder of it, the trans-dimensional physics of it, the eternal moment and the mystery of the activity in which we will be involved. We are not talking harps and white wings and Philadelphia cream cheese. We are not talking century long sermons and decade long choir practices. We are talking a new existence with new parameters of time and space and relationships.

And of course, all this is foolishness to those who do not believe, who do not receive what the Holy Spirit teaches us in Scripture. Heaven is for the weak. And may we acknowledge our weakness that we might be strong in the wisdom of the Lord. We need God. I need God.

When you say "I need God" truthfully, you are choosing to believe and trust this One who can help you. Unless you choose to trust God, to believe what Jesus says is true, all this is foolishness and weakness to boot. Only the Holy Spirit gives us the grace to receive these things that others find foolish.

We have spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ, all of us who believe. The question is: Are we using that gift or those gifts to build up the Church? Do we know how we can help here and do we choose to use our time to do so? We will have a list of ways you can help.

This isn't just to keep you busy because you aren't busy enough. This is to fulfill your God given gifts in life changing ways. So ask the Lord, and someone close to you: "What do you think my spiritual gifts are? How has God gifted me to help the Church go forward in these days and weeks?" And then also volunteer what you think others' gifts are in the body of Christ. Don't wait until they have to ask you. Voluntarily tell them the wonderful things that God has put in them to help others know and love God more.

Together we are the church. Together we can be ready to do that which God calls us to do and be.

Is there something you would like to do here? Tell me. Tell us. We'll see if we can't make sure you get a chance to do and to be what God is whispering in your ear. Remember to keep your ears open. And there's a fellow in the Canadian Bible Society that ends his emails with, "Remember to keep the Son (s-o-n) in your eyes." Let us pray.