

St. Andrew's and St. David's Presbyterian Churches      June 13, 2010  
Northbank Lodge, Pippy Park for our Annual Picnic  
St. John's, Newfoundland  
"Strength to be Weak"  
Dr. Jonathan Dent

The Church is the largest hospital on the planet. It is a place to deal with a disease called sin. Every human being has been infected with this disease. It's our mission to bring as many as we can to the doctor, Dr. Jesus who can deal with this disease and its ravages. In fact, he is the only one who has never been infected.

One of the problems we face is many of us don't like the hospital or even being in it and don't get along with other patients. We are afraid of what the disease we have will do to us and to our loved ones. At times, we are paralyzed with fear.

How do you feel when you are in the hospital, I mean Health Sciences or St. Clare's or one of the other ones here? How do you feel visiting there? How do you feel as a patient?

Many of us get in touch with how little control we have over others' health. Many of us just find it painful to go to the hospital, because we have to look at our own pain, our own losses, our own imperfections, our own health. Others of us stay in some place of denial that the disease isn't all that bad and radical choices don't have to be made. But we all have choices to make and the disease we have leads to death, unless we come to the doctor and receive His remedy. (gospel here) And even then it takes the rest of our lives to recover, because the disease has so infected us, that we still show the symptoms of it after the recovery. The recovery is called sanctification.

And we are surprised when we read the stories of Scripture that tell us that those closest to God also have committed great sins. Noah had a drinking problem. Abraham had difficulty telling the truth, the whole truth. Moses murdered a man. David committed adultery and then tried to cover it up with the murder of his partner's husband. Lest we think we are better than them, Jesus says on the sermon on the mount that if we even think about others in this way, we have murdered and committed adultery and lied from our hearts. All have been infected with the same disease, and when we look

at one another, even the great figures of faith and history, we shouldn't be surprised to see them as flawed humans, like you and me.

God tells David a story about a rich man who has large numbers of sheep and money, but who takes his poor neighbor's one female lamb, and prepares a meal with it for a visitor because he didn't want to take one of his own lambs. David reacts with great anger because he too had been a shepherd and knew what it was like to look after sheep. Then Nathan tells him that he is the man. The sins that he thought he did in private were well known to God.

And the story is for all of us who think that somehow we can get away with our private sins and can somehow cover them up with greater sins. This story is a way for us to recognize that we all rebel against God and God's ways. This is an invitation back to the hospital where we can receive care and mercy, love and forgiveness.

It is also a story to remind us to look at others with compassion and grace for what they are going through. We do not know where others are coming from and what they have experienced as children, let alone last week. We are encouraged to judge not, lest we be judged, from Jesus' sermon on the mount. This doesn't mean we don't evaluate or discern what's going on, but it does mean we are not invited to condemn, to quickly place someone in hell, lest we too be condemned by the same measure of judgment.

David's life of faith continued after he sinned. He experienced consequences from his sin, but he did not give up on his faith nor the kingdom which he was leading. What he did do was acknowledge that he had sinned, directly to God and to others. James says that this kind of confession is the way to be healed. "Confess your sins to one another that you may be healed." James 5:16

It is difficult to say "I was wrong. Please forgive me." It goes against our pride. It goes against our natural inclination to blame others, evident in the garden of Eden, after eating the fruit. Saying, "I was wrong. Please forgive me." Takes personal responsibility for what happened. It places us for a moment under the power of the other, because they can choose to forgive or not. We are not in control. But we can gain the strength to be weak enough to confess our sins to God and one another.

One of the physiotherapy exercises God gives to the body of Christ is prayer. We need to pray for one another...

Nationally

Locally

Personally