

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"Grieving, Maturing, Healing"  
Dr. J. Dent

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Proper 8

The true character of a person is often revealed in the midst of a crisis. Not that anyone goes out looking for crises in life, they just seem to come. Someone has chest pain and stays in the hospital for weeks, then major surgery. It makes a person think a bit differently about life. Someone gets out of the shower and dries off with a towel and then sees some blood on the towel from a mole then they never really noticed. After some tests, and confirmed cancer, it makes you think. The person I'm thinking of passed away within six months. Or maybe it's a son or daughter that gets into a tight spot by some poor choices. Or maybe somebody "loses it" at work and some act of violence happens to you or someone close to you.

Every crisis is a loss of the familiar and the routine. I suppose having a new baby might be considered a crisis by that definition. And with such losses, and such significant change, some people experience a lack of sleep, a lack of energy, often anger and anxiety. This is a time for drawing on the deepest resources you have. It is a time to reconsider all that life means beyond work, beyond the main things and contexts that usually fill our lives and our time. How we handle loss says a lot about us in terms of our maturity. And as we go on in life, we have many opportunities to experience loss at many levels. As someone told me in the last year, the only reason they subscribe to the local newspaper is for reading the obituaries.

David in the Bible in 2 Samuel 1 had experienced a profound loss. His friend, who had been the royal prince, was killed in battle. Jonathan had given David his most prized possessions as a token of what his friendship meant to him. He had given David his time and his love in a friendship that was marked by high highs and low lows. He loved his friend more than women, which I take as a statement of the depth of the friendship and not a sexual statement, as some hear it today. These men had found in each other what many men need today, the support, the care, the listening ear, the mutual respect and also a deep trust in God together which I fear is rare in male friendships today.

David was a shepherd and a warrior, a singer/songwriter and a general of the army. He was a man with diverse interests, but most of all a man of God, a person who deeply trusted the Lord. Yes, he made mistakes and sinned greatly as well. But God used him in extraordinary ways.

And there was in David's life an extraordinary grace and a huge measure of forgiveness. Why do I say this? Because we know that in 2 Samuel we have the lament, the song remembering his best friend Jonathan. But we also have in this song a great deal of content positively remembering Jonathan's father Saul. Saul had been king and this was appropriate. However, we also have many chapters of reading about how Saul tried to kill Jonathan. He tried to murder David with his own hands, with death squads, with the whole army of Israel. And during these campaigns against David, many opportunities were given up by David to kill Saul when he could have. But the Scripture indicates that he would not lift his hand against God's chosen leader, nor allow those under his command to lift their hands against him either. Imagine writing an obituary for someone who had often tried to murder you, or even more difficult, writing a positive song about him. David had matured at a young age to be able to trust God and wait, to forgive others who had meant him harm and to move forward in God's ways and will.

David put his trust in God more than anything else. He believed God would see him through, as he had been called and anointed to serve the Lord, so he could wait to receive what God had for him. This ability to wait, to reflect, to listen, to express faith in poetry, song and music is a gift. But we are called in this instant age to often pause and reflect, what the Psalms call "selah" as far we can translate. The Psalms are David's book, although there are other songwriters in the book.

We read from the Psalms every week, more than any other book of the Bible, because there is power in music and the lyrics of music given from God. I believe this is true across the board in music, even secular music. And we don't have to look all the way back to when the Beatles went on Ed Sullivan, with screaming young women in the audience. Witness the outpouring of affection and devotion of some kind to Michael Jackson in this last week, born the same year as me. Some might say Michael was one of the strangest music stars we have seen in this generation, changing race, most probably into pedophilia, dangling his infant child over a balcony, and

you've probably seen the news lately. Nevertheless, what people remember is the power of his music, again what some might say is bizarre lyrics and outlandish choreography, but nevertheless the power is there. And I believe the power is there because God has given a power to music and musical lyrics, which has for centuries been devoted to the faith, and in classical circles to the sagas and myths of the various cultures, and now in a secular context, to whatever themes move those who write and record.

One of the reasons we cannot think of worship without music and singing is because God put them together, and the little shepherd out in the fields as a nobody with his sheep sang to the Lord with all his might, playing simple instruments like the recorder and the guitar. And that heart, that attitude stayed in David his whole life. And that same heart God wants to cultivate in each one of us. Now you may not consider yourself musical and the only thing musical you play is the radio. But no matter what you think of your musical ability, it is the heart which cries out to God in crisis, and day to day through our routines that God desires. So we talk along with or sing along with David week by week, going through the ups and downs of life with him, giving all our feelings, bad, good, crazy or indifferent to God.

Such is our worship. Such is God's heart toward us to want us to invite God into every part of our lives. Just like the woman with a hemorrhage, went to Jesus in her need; just like Jairus went to Jesus in his need, when his little girl was dying; just as David went to God in his need when he lost his friend, so we go to God, just like they did. Oh yeah, times have changed. Thousands of years have passed. Yet the human heart is still in a very similar condition. We are just as likely to not wait, as they were not likely to wait in their culture. The difference is that we to go to the blackberry, to go to the computer, or go to the telephone, or go to the TV, when we have a spare moment. (CBC DNTO programming of June 27, 2009) But God is looking for that moment to speak a word you need to hear.

And so we come here week by week to listen. I hope that is the spirit in which we come, it is the spirit I try to come and stay in. Because it is hard to listen. It is hard to deal with loss. It is hard to put words on how life is changing right now, how culture is changing, how the weather is changing.

How much more difficult it is to see our own hearts and realize how we are changing or staying the same. Perhaps the first step of healing in any of our

lives is simply being still enough to know what we really want. And when we cannot have it, to know how to be content; and yet to still dream and still hope; and still face our fears, our anxieties, our greatest challenges.

I realize that Canada Day is coming and beyond it being a holiday, there are many here who remember July 1 more as a Memorial Day, as it has been in the culture here for many years. There is an ambivalence in Newfoundland culture toward Canada. I'm not sure it is as strong as the ambivalence in Quebec, but it is very similar. The primary identity is with the province, and many here know this place before it was even a province, but a colony or a country, depending on how you read history.

I believe it is good to celebrate both Newfoundland and Canada this week. I believe it is a good time to pray for them both, and to pray for ourselves.

Let us pray.