

## A TIMELY EXAMINATION OF MY EYES

This past Thursday was the 20th anniversary of my ordination as a minister of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church in Canada. The ceremony began around 3:30 p.m. that day and it was around 4:15 p.m. when I kneeled and had hands laid upon me for my ordination. Around the same time in the afternoon last Thursday, I was having my eyes examined at the optometrist's office. I thought it was rather fitting to have my eyes examined around the exact moment of the 20th anniversary of my ordination. The reason why I say this is because I have seen many things during the first 20 years of ordained ministry. For instance:

- I have seen several times when God placed me in the midst of difficult situations in order to restore peace and order.
- I have seen a lot of death, grief, and loss as I have officiated almost 400 funerals during this time.
- I have seen God develop so many gifts in me during this time that I did not have for ministry when He first called me.
- I have seen God perform a miracle before my eyes when a person who was determined as being brain dead was about to be taken off life support but as I prayed with the family at his bed side all of a sudden, he opened his eyes and was able to move his limbs on his own. Even the doctor and nurse who were nearby as I prayed admitted it was a miracle.
- I have seen ministers treated very well, and also very poorly by some congregations.
- I have seen how people are drawn to church when tragedies happen like 9/11, and then stop coming when life returns to normal.
- I have seen so many Christians roll up their sleeves and serve the Lord faithfully, and others who choose not to.
- I have seen so many children (and adults also) have fun and learn from my children's stories, and seen a few people fall asleep through my sermons too.
- I have seen so many times how God has faithfully provided for the church and His people, even in the midst of a pandemic.
- I have seen God answer so many prayers for healing and am still always touched when people will ask me to pray for them or a friend going through a difficult time.
- I have seen my share of many churches closing but was also blessed to see the successful amalgamation of our two churches.

- I have seen my share of good tears at wedding celebrations, births, and baptisms, but also the sad tears over loss, divorce, illness, and tragedy.
- I have seen the best in Christians at times, as well as the worse. What I mean is I have seen Christians make some incredible sacrifices, and also do some very selfish things. I have seen love on the part of Christians as well as anger and unforgiveness.
- And I have seen so many times how God can take a bad situation and make something good come out of it.

I could just keep going on and on about the many things I have seen during my first 20 years of ordained ministry. One thing I could not add to my list is seeing the Toronto Maple Leafs win the Stanley Cup during that time. If I was asked to sum up what I have seen during these 20 years I would say this:

**I HAVE SEEN HOW GOOD GOD IS, AND THAT I SHOULD NEVER TAKE FOR GRANTED THE GIFT OF FAITH, THE POWER OF PRAYER, THE PLANS GOD HAS FOR ME, AND THE PRIVILEGE OF BEING ABLE TO SERVE HIM.**

Prior to last Thursday, I had not had my eyes tested for four years. I think it was a God thing that my appointment was scheduled for the same time to mark the 20th anniversary of my ordination. It made me pause, to look back and see the many things that God has been doing in my life during that time.

Taking time to reflect back over a period of time to see all of the things that God has done for us is something we should all do. Solomon did this from time to time in his life. In Ecclesiastes 3:11 we read one such time that Solomon did so. This is what he wrote:

**Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.**

Solomon was blessed with the gift of wisdom from God. As he reflected on his experiences in life, Solomon was able to see:

- How God is good and that everything He creates and does is beautiful in its own time,
- How God has planted eternity in our hearts and as a result we can never be satisfied with earthly treasures and pursuits,

- How even though we cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end we can trust Him and walk in complete confidence and faith with Him.

Solomon was able to see all of these things because he took the time to reflect upon everything that he had experienced with God up until that point.

I looked back upon the 20 years since my ordination to see all that God had done for me. Solomon looked back upon his life journey to see these things about God. Come July it will be 16 months since we saw the beginning of this pandemic. If you were to take a moment and reflect back upon these 16 months to see everything He has done for you, what do you think your list would include? I think you would see:

- How much God loves you and cares for you,
- How He has always been there for you through the good and bad,
- How reliable and faithful God has always been,
- How His grace is sufficient to get you through life's toughest of days,
- How blessed you are to have the relationship you do with Him,
- How God has blessed you with a message of hope when you needed it the most,
- How God has not forgotten you through this.

These are just some of the things that I think you might see about God if you took the time to reflect back upon these past 16 months. I encourage you to go through this exercise like I did and like Solomon did. By so doing, we are able to see more clearly how much our faith matters, and how amazing God truly is.

I have been blessed to see a lot in my first 20 years of being an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church in Canada. As I begin the journey into my 21st year I do not know the whole scope of the work and ministry God has in store for me. I am okay with this because I have seen from my first 20 years what a privilege it is to serve Him and what a blessing it is that I can trust Him no matter what. I hope that as you look back upon these past 16 months, you feel the same way as you journey forward into life post-pandemic.

**Keep Safe and God Bless**

**Pastor Dean**

**P.S.** I will still keep hoping that I see the Toronto Maple Leafs win a Stanley Cup one day.