

## A LESSON ON PERSPECTIVE

Proverbs 9. 1-6

Ephesians 5. 15-20

John 6. 51-58

I speak to you in the name of † the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

Today I would like to start my talk by inviting you to think about perspective. Those of us who have studied art or architecture will know about perspective. It is ‘the capacity to render things in their true relations or relative importance’. If I were to leave this church and go out and draw a picture of Les Gravées and the way it continues into town, if I did not depict the roads in perspective, they would look very flat indeed; and one would not even know that in order to go into town, you must actually descend a hill; and that the roads are not always straight, but rather follow a curve.

I do not have a sketch of Les Gravées here with me, but as we continue to think about perspective, I have drawn a dot, a black dot on a column that is supporting the ceiling of a building. Now imagine that the column that this dot is drawn on is thousands of miles thicker than it really is; and imagine that the ceiling it supports is a million miles taller than it really is; and if you can, imagine that this space on the page is a billion times more beautiful than it already is. Now, keeping my little dot the same size and the same quality, imagine that this dot is your life, filled with all its accomplishments, the wealth that you have acquired, the power, greatness and potential that you have. This dot is your life; and the building on which the dot is placed is eternal life. Most things that we hear outside of this church beg and plead for us to direct all of our energies toward this dot. And whether it is because of fear, ignorance or wilfulness, often times we try to ignore what surrounds the dot.

Perhaps this parable will illustrate. There once was a baby born to a man and a woman. The baby came into the world with absolutely nothing. But almost immediately, he was given a blanket and was wrapped up tight. And so it began. He was given a dummy, and a rattle and a little stuffed giraffe. The child grew into a man; and all along the way he accumulated more and more things that the world had to offer. He accumulated honours and degrees, and over time accumulated a little money and a house; and he filled the house with all sorts of other things, and on and on that went until the man began to grow tired and frail. One day the man became so ill that he had to go into hospital. And then, out of all the things that he had ever accumulated, he found that the most important of them fit into the drawer next to his hospital bed. And as the light in his eyes began to fade and as he prepared to depart this world with exactly what he brought into it, his eyes, for the last time, settled on the wall of his hospital room, a wall that suddenly began to loom millions of miles thick and billions of miles tall; and he felt that all his life had been reduced to was a very small dot. And he wasn't so sure whether or not all that surrounded him was a beautiful place or not.

Now here is another dot. This dot is an un-consecrated Communion host. As you look at it, I would ask you to reflect on its seeming insignificance: its lack of flavour and artistry; its complete lack of sophistication.

And if I hold this dot up against the pencil dot that I drew earlier, though much larger and brighter than my pencil dot, it is still puny and insignificant in relationship to all the glory that surrounds it. Here at St Stephen's Church, we see that this dot is surrounded by stone, glass, statues, wood, music, and people. Yet the irony is that this dot is the reason for all of the beauty that surrounds us. In a manner of speaking, this church building was built because of this dot. The statues in this church were carved because of this dot. The music that we have heard and will hear today was written to honour this dot.

Our voices, rising in song and praise and prayer all at once, beseech God to give us this dot and thank him for having given it. We owe our very lives to this dot. And if our lives become anything more than this small pencil dot, we will owe it to this small dot which is the Communion host.

The mystery of the Eucharist is that when prayers are said over the elements of bread and wine, we become witnesses to a glorious cooperation within the Holy Trinity. God our Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit, makes the bread and the wine the very presence of Jesus Christ. And this is not done in some far off place where we cannot see it. It takes place in front of our very eyes: ‘Accept our praises, heavenly Father, through your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, and as we follow his example and obey his command, grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit these gifts of bread and wine may be to us his body and his blood.’

In our appointed text from St John’s gospel, our Lord says that the bread and the wine are his flesh and his blood; that any one of us who eats his flesh and drinks his blood will have eternal life; and that he will raise them up on the last day.

What is happening here?

What is happening is that, if we can recall the image of the pencil dot and eternal life, in the Eucharist the insignificant dot or Communion wafer is transformed into the glory of eternal life; and the apparent glory of earthly things, be they stone, glass or wood, becomes as smudged and insignificant as that pencil dot on the column. Everything that we boast of in this place – even a place so beautiful as St Stephen’s Church – will ultimately be seen to be temporal and finite. On the other hand, the insignificant dot that is the Communion wafer will become the only real thing in this place (if we define ‘real’ as solid, trustworthy, necessary and eternal). When the day

comes that all that surrounds us is just stone tumbled upon stone, the body of Christ will go on and on and on and on.

If we live entirely for ourselves or for the things of this world, this pencil dot on a column will be our monument: the smudge. If, on the other hand, we labour for this Communion host dot, for Jesus; and if we receive him into our hearts by faith and with thanksgiving, our lives (like this wafer, which once looked like a speck in the universe) will be transformed. Christ will live in us; and he will raise us up to the full stature of himself. We will be filled with his life-giving Spirit and with all the glory and immensity of the life eternal. No epitaph will be sufficient to describe our lives; no monuments will be sufficient to honour them; nor will any cathedral be able to contain them. Because we will go on and on and on and on, in union with our loving Father, with his guiding Spirit and with his co-eternal Son.

It is so important for us to come to the altar rail and to receive Holy Communion with a right *perspective*; to see things in their proper relations, whether we are feeling very small and insignificant (as most of us do sometimes) or whether we are too big for our britches (as most of us act sometimes). Holy Communion helps put things in proper perspective. The Eucharist is not something we can make for ourselves; God makes it for us. It is not something we take for ourselves; we hold out our hands, and it is given to us and we receive it.

We take great care about our spiritual disposition, confessing our sins before receiving Communion and seeking God's forgiveness, lest we eat communion to our own corruption. We revere this seemingly insignificant dot this Communion host, because we see it for what it really is.

*This* is the means by which we are able to live for Christ, while living in the world;  
*this* is the means by which we are able to labour for things eternal and keep the things  
of this world - and ourselves - in their proper perspective.

Amen.