

May 24, 2020 We Are Witnesses Pt. 6 Psalm 16:11

Dearly Beloved in the Lord;

For Barbara and I it has been a good week. We continue to be well. And I continue to be encouraged. The kindness of you toward us during this season of plague has been very touching. I had to attend a meeting of Presbytery during the week, by means of the same internet platform that Rev. Rebekah used for the Maundy Thursday and Mother's Day services that we shared with those of you who are computer able. My doorbell rang during the meeting and I was greeted not only by one of our Helping Hands, but by a little bear, clearly a Presbyterian preacher. Thank you, dear friends! (It was the best part of Presbytery). At the farmhouse, which is now open and functional, we continue doing Spring cleanup. Five of our 20 foot lilacs came down in the winds of winter or early Spring, along with one maple tree. When I get it all cut up we will have a fresh supply of wood for the fires in the wood stove in the Fall. I trust this letter finds you and your extended family well. May the fire of God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit who reveals Jesus to us, burn in your hearts and minds as the fuel of your faith. Rebekah and Matthew talk to us daily by phone. They have never been so attentive. The grace of God is poured out upon us in our family ties and in the mirror of your concern for the church and the faith it represents. Time to turn to the Word.

In the Biblical word, the word witness is not so much about telling others about Jesus, as it is the claim to have

seen HIM, and heard Him, during HIS ministry (3 years) and on the 1st day of the week which we celebrate as Sunday in honour of the resurrection. They witnessed its reality. They saw Jesus. This series is about taking a few moments to recognize that we too have seen things.

Psalm 16 contains a prophecy about the resurrection. Centuries before Jesus was born in Bethlehem David wrote “You” (that is the Lord God) “will not abandon me to the grave,” (in other words would keep David alive) “nor will you let your HOLY ONE see decay.” (A word of prophecy concerning the death and resurrection of the Messiah Psalm 16:10. As important as that is, I want to focus on the 11th verse. “You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.” And again I want to say, we have witnessed that together. We have tasted the richness of joy as we have worshipped before God in the sanctuary, on the church lawns, in the church Hall, and even by the River hosted by Lois and Glenn, and in the beautiful backyard of Brian and Juanita.

Two things that are really important to recognize: the defining nature of worship, and a clear understanding of what the church is. Worship is that activity we do together when we gather to sing the praises of God, to talk with Him in prayer, and receive HIS answer to the appeals of our hearts; activity that is built upon and around the reading of the Biblical word, hearing dedicated teaching on that word, and tasting the joy of the Lord in the midst of it all. Worship is best when it is

done with others. It is in worship that the fellowship finds its reason for being.

A clear understanding of what the church is, has little to do with the red brick structure by the creek and the mill pond with a steeple and dedicated space. Do not misunderstand me...I am certainly not against our having a "church" facility. It allows us to do a number of things including lending that space to others who would not be able to meet without our generosity in that regard. It allows us to gather for a meal together; for coffee, and soup and bread, and cake and ice cream! But look at the list of where the church has met to worship: the sanctuary, of course, a dedicated space that allows us to worship when it rains, when it is cold, in the midst of winter, and wind, and even uncomfortable heat. But the church has worshipped on the lawns, in the church Hall, in the back yards of our people with a picnic out of doors as well. Because the church is a family of faith, people gathering to sing and pray and hear the word, sharing announcements, and caring for one another.

And in the midst of all, a measure of joy in spite of the circumstances. In spite of serious illness. In spite of the loss of a loved one. I never get over the fact that when we host a funeral service, there are of course tears, but there is also almost always laughter. In the sharing of memories there are smiles and giggles. Signs. Visible signs. Signs we have seen of how precious the departed person was to us or part of the circle to which we belong as neighbours and friends, family and

of course...believers. You have witnessed joy in the midst of tragic loss. You have witnessed joy in the midst of serious and even heavy circumstances. As we approach June photographs pop up on my computer of Barbara and I attending the party in the Church Hall as part of our 50th wedding anniversary. My first church as an ordained minister was in Kapuskasing. We were there through the building of the church building that continues to serve 2 congregations. And the chairman of our building committee, Helmet Serwotka and his wife Ruth were present at that party in St. Andrew's Stirling. Just telling the story makes me smile. Joy!

When I was ill in 2015 (cancer and surgery) and Barbara brought me to St. Andrew's to attend a service conducted by Rev. Rebekah, the obvious joy that I was able and willing to attend with you, the joy on my part just seeing all of you, we are witnesses to that reality. In the midst of the race of life and even the awfulness of Plague, we have tasted joy with its principle signs of smiles and laughter. And the reminders that we should never say "never." I said, I would never go to Israel. Went twice. I hope you can hear the smile on my face. I certainly said I would never get on a camel...that one makes me giggle. Joy! We are witnesses to the fact of joy as a gift from God in the strangest (some would say the dumbest) of circumstances.

Finally, three things to think about. David celebrates that God has made known to David, the path of his life. He has done that for you and I as well. We are not sick in

the time of terrible plague...not with Covid-19. Apparently God has made it clear there is more for me to do, and perhaps more importantly more for you to do, and triumphantly, more for the church to do. What more lies ahead of us? I have not had “secrets” revealed to me, but clearly we are not done yet, nor is the Lord done with us. That in itself is reason for joy! And we witness the joy of our brothers and sisters. Family and friends.

Then David says, “Lord you will fill me with joy in your presence!” That phrasing is about the unfolding future. We have not had all the joy we are going to get, there is more to come. Promises of future joy, moments in which we will know the presence of Jesus here on earth, and in heaven. There is more joy to come. And you have witnessed both the promise and the prophecy. Get ready to smile, get ready to laugh, get ready to rejoice, to experience, to see and hear the sounds of joy.

And finally “eternal pleasures at the right hand of Jesus.” That too awaits us. Apparently there will be sounds of celebration attending our home coming when we enter into the other phase of eternal life. Party. Praise. Simple unadorned joy. I was sitting on the deck at the farmhouse, Barbara and I had put out the bird feeders, we feed the birds all summer long. I remember the moment when the Baltimore Oriole appeared. A bright brilliant orange with black wings. We did not speak. We both smiled. Joy! In the midst of social isolation. And we witnessed the joy of one another; it is infectious. And

delightful! And we are and we will be witnesses. We will see it. We will notice the time, note the circumstances. Praise God!

Let us pray;

Lord we praise your name for the gift of joy, the gift that gives twice. First when it happens, and secondly the memories that replay in our minds as we remember moments of joy that we witnessed. How you have blessed us in giving this marvelous and singular gift. Joy with smiles that make the wrinkles in our face more pronounced, especially at the corners of our eyes. And the machine gun bursts of laughter that erupt spontaneously from our throats in the midst of joy! We praise YOUR holy name for the gift, and Your being the giver...of joy. Amen