

May 31, 2020 We Are Witnesses Pt. 7 Psalm 22:9

Dearly Beloved;

Barbara was the one who said it first. I have often repeated her words. For some strange reason it is so much easier to self-isolate at the farmhouse. Actually, there is not much mystery to that reality. At the farmhouse, our nearest neighbour's house is a kilometer north of our place. The farmer, and former reeve of Madoc township died in the winter of 2015. His widow now lives in a senior's residence in the village of Madoc. We do not have visitors, when we are at the farmhouse, and we do not seek them out. Barbara's brother and our sister-in-law have brought us a Tim Horton's coffee twice. We sat outside at the picnic table my late father-in-law built, and we sat 6 feet apart. The land has turned green, the grass needs to be cut, (Barb rides the lawn tractor and I push the gas powered mower doing trim work) and we spend a lot of time watching the birds who visit our 3 feeders. It all sounds very peaceful...it does soothe the soul in troubled and troubling times.

So once again I say, by the grace of God we are well. Be assured you are never far from our minds, and we pray for you and your loved ones. While we are clearly winning the war against Covid-19 (the curve has flattened and even diminished) but as I am sure you are aware spikes are still occurring in our province, and especially in our capital cities. We are daily reminded that we are only one mistake away from a fresh outbreak of this viral disease. The Kingston Trio, years ago, sang a song that began with the spoken words,... "These

are the times that try men's souls..."So let us turn to God's Word together for refreshment, and once again discover that we are indeed witnesses of marvelous truth.

Psalm 22 opens with a cry of despair. The Oxford Dictionary defines despair as "a complete loss of hope." In the mystery of Jesus total divinity, while being totally human, it is no surprise that HE would take these words on his lips in the midst of the agony of dying on Calvary's cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1) The words seem to suit the circumstance. What has been done cannot be reversed. Some physicians have estimated that by the time the nails were driven through Jesus wrists, HE had already lost more than 50 per cent of HIS blood supply by volume. Death is inevitable. Life is slipping away and Jesus knows exactly what is happening. But we can never dispute that Jesus said the words..."My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Sin, our sin, yours and mine has enveloped HIM. He experiences for the first time in HIS beloved life, the absence of the Father. He knows what it is to be absolutely alone, as HIS life ebbs away, as the end approaches. Such is the love of Jesus for every human being who lives on this planet, has lived on this planet and who will live on this planet. HE gave HIMSELF to the work of redeeming us, saving us, and HE accepted that greatest of painful realities...a complete loss of hope that the pain would stop, that there would be a miraculous recovery. His breathing becomes more difficult,

until HE simply cannot. With the words, "It is finished," Jesus gives up HIS life to save ours.

I want you to notice two things: (1) Jesus did lose hope that he could die for us easily, comfortably; (2) He did not lose HIS faith in the midst of that terrible experience of the cross. In HIS loss of hope, HE expresses HIS faith. "My God! MY God." Jesus expresses HIS faith in the Biblical words of the Psalm. He also commits HIMSELF to the rest of the Heaven authored assignment. There is no reversing or preventing of the pain. And HE faces that pain as HE faced everything, expressing HIS faith that HIS Father is unfolding the plan of salvation. It is simply remarkable!

But, as the title line of this letter says, I chose a different verse on which to focus our attention. The 9<sup>th</sup> verse of Psalm 22. Words that are always worth remembering, and especially when we cannot see how our current difficulties are going to end, or what the timing will be. Here is a word for circumstances in which we are tempted to lose hope. "Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast." The meaning is basic. At the precisely right moment in time, the Lord God Almighty brought us into this world, out of the womb. Here, in the midst of a Psalm that says so much about Jesus experience in saving us, by dying for us, being crucified, the Lord, reminds us HIS hand was upon us as we took our first breath (definitely not on our own!)\_and definitely not alone either.

It is not just religious gobbledegook (by the way that is a real word, spelled correctly, and it means professional jargon, like theology,) so let me repeat: it is not religious gobbledegook, that God made you for a purpose. HE brought you...and me...and your uncle Harry, and your own children forth from the womb. “(God) made you trust in HIM at your mother’s breast.” I am quoting the NIV translation because we have that one in the pews at good ole St. Andrew’s. It suggests that faith is something uniquely tied to being born and receiving our first nourishment from our mothers. That is not bad! Worth remembering in light of Covid-19 and not being able to worship together.

But! There is a but? You might have suspected I would get to this. I like the King James Version of this verse even better. “But thou art he (the living God) that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me HOPE when I was upon my mother’s breasts.” And you should remember why I like the KJV, not for its poetic or exotic sound when read out loud, “but because it is the most accurate, word for word, translation in Elizabethan English.”

All of the modern translations, as we call them, are guilty of this shortcoming. I was tempted to say sin, but I did not do so. The modern translators all want us to get the meaning of the passage. Unfortunately, they usually mean, the meaning they hold to be sound. The word for word translation lacks that agenda. And sometimes we find ourselves saying, “Boy, is that ever different from what it says

in the King James.” All translations including the KJV present us with problems. In the case of the KJV the chief one is its age. We no longer talk in Elizabethan English and some words have changed in meaning over the last 500 years. So what is it I like about the KJV translation of verse 9 in Psalm 22?

The old word for word translation makes several points without even trying. First of all hope is linked to faith. David for all his other shortcomings, and he had a wheel barrow full of shortcomings, was a believer. He believed his mother nurtured him and carried him in her womb. He believed he was born in God’s time. He believed he was loved, and every time his mother took him to her breasts to feed, as an infant who could not say a word, he rediscovered the meaning of hope in the midst of the struggle to grow and to live. And because David was the kind of man he was, he believed profoundly that it was the Living God who gave him the hope he experienced as his mother nursed him. This is treasured stuff in the world of Covid-19. And every man, woman and child has witnessed it. You have witnessed it. God gave you life in this world at the moment of HIS gracious choosing, and you experienced hope as a first time experience at your mother’s breast, by the grace of God.

In a time when so little seems certain, God continues to give us hope. The apostle Paul wrote in his first letter to the believers in Corinth, chapter 13, “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.” (1 Corinthians 13:13) And you are right I quoted that

verse from the old word for word translation. Remember the hymn, Abide With Me? What faith hungers for is that God abide with us, be with us, present even when our eyes cannot assure us of HIS presence. Paul is saying that in the abiding presence of God with us, no matter the circumstances, faith, hope and love exist. He goes on to say love (charity) is the greatest of the three. My point is this. The Lord Jesus is with you right now, where you are. And because that is true, and because Jesus not only died on that cross but rose on the third day from that tomb, you and I have faith, and we experience hope (not that this plague might end but that it will! And we have witnessed the love of a lot of people who have self isolated and socially distanced themselves, for their own safety and for ours.

You have witnessed it. When you were a new born baby, you experienced hope in your mother's arms as she fed you your first meal. That gift of hope is still yours to experience. The Lord gave you life, and you witnessed the reality of hope. And love too. The same Psalm that tells us about Jesus agony, tells us about the reality of hope. We have it unto eternity. You have seen it. You are witnesses.

'Til next time. The blessings of Jesus presence be with you. Let us pray.

Lord we hunger for the time when this plague is a memory. Over. Done. History. Yours is the power to get us there. Yours is the love that saves. You gave us life. And you have given us hope. And O how you love us. Pour your Spirit upon us again

and again. Cause our faith to grow like the radishes that have sprung from tiny seeds. Fill us with hope, that we might have the energy and the strength to cope with this in between time. We sing before you that you might have the glory and the praise. Amen