

June 21, 2020 We Are Witnesses Pt. 10 Genesis 1:11-13

Dearly Beloved;

I am writing to you today because we are obviously not meeting or trying to meet, in our church facility on Mill Street. Two things happened this week that are significant to all of us. Our Presbytery met (virtually) on Tuesday. After a lengthy discussion, the Presbytery of Kingston passed a motion, recognizing that our Canon Law permits only Sessions to set the times of worship services, but it asked Sessions to consider the wisdom of not opening before the first Sunday in September. Our Session met Thursday evening and decided for the safety of our congregation, the majority of whom are over 60, and many of whom have health issues, that we would meet again at the end of August to revisit the question of when to open our church building for worship. The decision to wait is not made lightly. Our sole consideration is the safety of all the people who would and could attend worship were it to occur in the Church Hall, or the sanctuary.

The Public Health requirements endorsed by our denomination would, and will eventually require the following: encouraging people to respect 6 feet distancing from others when we leave our cars and enter. Entering by the front doors only. Leaving by a different set of doors...the choir door on the west side from the sanctuary or the west side door of the Church Hall. Disinfecting hand rails whenever they are touched during entry or departure. Seating so as to maintain 6 ft. distancing. No singing. No Choir. No food. No contact of a

physical nature (right hand of fellowship, or hugging). It needs to be recognized that worship will be different...to the sole end of keeping people healthy and alive. Hymn Books will not be in use. If you want to hold a Bible, bring one from home and share it with no one. As of Friday, 8300 Canadians have lost their lives because of this virus. Public Assembly is serious business. I have not seen or touched my children since February except by a computer screen.

When we do have the opportunity of assembling in the Church, we will need help from many of you to attend to these listed tasks. Offering plates will not be passed, they will be stationed so that you can place your offering in them as you arrive. I will be wearing a face shield and I encourage you to wear masks. If you do not feel safe, do not attend. This is not an issue requiring great faith, or bravery. It is about being wise. We need to recognize there is much we simply do not understand about Covid-19. It has swept around the world taking lives in every nation it has touched. In the mean-time I will continue to produce this online sermon, and the occasional link to a video service. God bless you! Stay safe. Keep the faith. Jesus Christ is Lord. With all that has been shared to this moment, let us turn to God's Word.

The reading this morning from Genesis chapter 1, is the episode called the 3<sup>rd</sup> day. God calls forth, and by HIS word, the land produces vegetation, seed bearing plants and trees. "I think that I shall never see/ A thing as beautiful as a tree." I remember that line of poetry from school days, and I

was very, very young. This past week I was sitting on the deck at the farmhouse. The deck was in full shade of a towering maple tree, I planted in the early 1990's. It is a beautiful tree and one of many I planted when I was younger and more vigorous. And it is beautiful. I believe that that is what is in part captured in God's pronouncement as the world's landscape turned green and began to flower, "And God saw that it was good."

There is something mysteriously and marvelously spiritual about sitting under a tree when it is hot outside, and enjoying the cool breeze and the sound the breeze makes as it rustles the foliage. As many of you are aware, I use 2 hearing aids. It is a wonder to me that I cannot hear half of what Barbara says to me, and yet I can hear the breeze moving the foliage overhead and around me. It is such a soft sound, and yet for all my hearing loss, I can still hear the rustling of the leaves.

When we bought the farmhouse one of its features was a towering white Pine. I estimate it as close to 100 ft. high. It has been bruised, battered and torn by winter winds, ice, wet snow and 100 km. per hour winds as part of summer thunderstorms. I remember a song from a western movie that belonged to my youth called, "Whispering Pines." I remember commenting to Barbara that our White Pine is never silent. I can still hear it whisper, though I wind up asking many of my friends to repeat the last part of what they said to me. The gentle sounds of creation's greenery continue to speak to

me. I am a witness, as you are also a witness of the soothing quality of trees, flowers and grass. These things speak to our souls in a way that many words, sermons, even passages from the Bible may fail to do. God is real. God is present. HIS creation, continues to bear witness to us of HIS power, HIS love, and HIS eye for beauty.

I have shared with you that since March 13<sup>th</sup>, Barbara and I have been spending our evenings watching movies that I have collected going back to the era of VHS tapes. More and more we have specialized in DVD's and Blue Ray as Blue Ray machines can read both of those different discs. Last night we watched "Miss Potter." It is the story of Beatrix Potter who gave us Peter Rabbit and Jemima Puddle Duck. Her children's books were the new rage, of the Victorian Era, and remained the most popular children's books until the arrival of J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series, which if you know what to look for, is the Christian Gospel in disguise.

"Miss Potter" belonged to a privileged class which spent the summer season in "The Lake's Region" of England, which reminds me a great deal of what we call Muskoka cottage country in Ontario. Lakes, rivers, hills, trees of all kinds and wild life among the farms. She drew inspiration from that rural area as a child and it became extremely important to her as middle aged woman when she moved from her London home, to that part of England. I have no interest in seeing London. I would not mind seeing The Lakes Region. In the summer it is so like parts of Ontario, and it causes me to

understand why British subjects found rural Ontario and Northern Ontario so very attractive.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of Creation, (and I am not limiting the meaning of that phrase to a 24 hour period, or a sundown to sundown period), but on the third unit of time in Making the cosmos, all that is, the stars and planets, Earth in its miraculous beauty, God made seed bearing plants. We have a 6 ft. by 3 ft. garden box at the farmhouse. There are 5 tomato plants across the back (socially distanced to produce ripe fruit). There are two rows of swiss chard. Two rows of green beans. 3 circles of lettuce. Two rows of carrots and two rows of radishes. The radishes are ready to become part of our salad plate. God made the plants we eat such that they would yield seed so we can plant them and count on them to produce food stuff.

I remember the day I said to Barbara's mother who passed away some years ago, "The Maple trees are in bloom." And she said, "What?" So I repeated myself. She said, "You're serious?" And I said, "Yes. If it produces seeds (and she knew about the Maple keys being the seed the tree produces) it must first have a flower." The leaves were not out yet but the Maples were covered with these little parachute-like things. I went out to our front yard and plucked one off a branch and brought it into her. I handed it to her and said, "the flower of the Maple tree!" And she replied, "You're never too old to learn something new. I didn't know the green trees bore flowers." God's recipe for the greening of the earth.

This message was born as I sat on my deck at the farmhouse. On the north side of that 1 acre lot is that towering White Pine I mentioned. The north fence line is covered by an 8 foot tall hedge of cedar. Green in every season! In fact we make a point of visiting our acre in December to bring home enough branches of Pine, Spruce and Cedar to decorate at our front door. On the west side we planted 3 Maples and an Oak tree. All of them have become big. There are lilacs all over the place, and a 70 foot stretch of 20 foot tall lilacs that provide a privacy wall of green between us and our side road on the east. It was a warm morning. I was enjoying my second cup of coffee and I thought...this is good. Birds were singing and some were actually feeding at our 3 feeders. And then the penny dropped. The Lord God said that, when he made the greenery of the forest, the flowers of the field, and the produce in the garden. And we are witnesses. We have seen it spring to life with our own eyes. We have felt (feelings are important), we have felt the wonder of God's creative power, and reveled in the beauty of the meadow teeming with life, grass, grain, orange lilies, sumac, prickly pear, and dandelions and golden rod, and a thousand insects (which are not plants). A meadow is a wonderful place!

Remember the premise of this series was, and is, we are witnesses. We have seen stuff first hand, right there in front of us, and our response has been variations on the theme of, "O my!!!!" Old Mrs. Westbrooke, who was the head of the English Department at Lakeview High School, and my teacher in the subjects of English in Grades 11, 12 and 13

taught me an exclamation point means the balance of the preceding words involve us in emotion. Imagine what “O my!!!!” followed by 4 of them means. Emotional reaction-response almost to tears? “And God saw that it was good.” We have seen it too. We are witnesses. Witnesses to the beauty of God’s greening of the landscape. Let us pray.

Dear God our Lord, Redeemer and Friend;

We thank you for the wonders of the vegetative part of the creation story. You gave us all the ingredients for salad...and such variety, coleslaw, garden and Greek. You gave us shade under the trees and in the spaces where they cast blessed shadows. You gave us the flowers and the flowering weeds. Poppies and portulaca, geraniums and gardenias. You gave us apples and oranges, and potatoes and carrots, peas and green beans. We praise your blessing us with the greenery and the food that comes from the garden. For loving the world, we say thank you, and we praise your name. Amen