

June 28, 2020 We Are Witnesses Pt. 10 Psalm 106:1-48

Dearly Beloved;

We are now truly, technically, and on the basis of science, into the summer of this year in which Covid-19 has wreaked havoc across our nation, and around the whole of the world. It is not over! We witness that in the spike of numbers that are so evident in the States of Florida, Texas and California, in the U.S.A. We have begun to see the devastation the virus is bringing to bare on so-called third world countries. One of the first features of poorer nations is greater numbers of death from this plague. Poverty and lack of health care are 2 of the reasons this is so. Even the mighty U.S.A., has had a greater death rate than Canada, primarily because people have to pay for health services, unless they can afford Health Insurance. In Canada, yesterday's numbers were that Covid-19 has contributed as cause, to more than 8,500 deaths.

I mention these details for 3 reasons. I want you to keep washing hands often, using hand sanitizer, and wearing a mask over the mouth and nose when entering into groups beyond the boundaries of family. I want you to continue to self-isolate, meaning not necessarily staying indoors, but being wise about the fact that the Covid-19 Plague is not over. And I want you to understand there is a serious reason why the celebration of Christian worship in a public setting, has been suspended, and continues to be suspended for a number of denominations and congregations. The suspension is an attempt by those who have made the decision, including the

Session of St. Andrew's Stirling, to protect you and keep you both healthy and alive.

We must continue to be very careful. That is the chief thing to be learned by the wise from the American experience of this disease. President Trump is right when he says they are a powerful nation with very special resources. They have not and still do not evidence the ability to take this plague seriously enough to either defend their own people, or find a medical response like a vaccine. This plague kills. It destroys the most vulnerable. It is alarming that so many young people and children are beginning to fall victim to it. God is with you. Please be very careful, and do not let down your guard. With that said, let us turn to God's Word.

This is becoming the longest series I have preached in your midst in my nine and a half years of being your minister. Usually the term "witness" is connected in Christian study with the charge to us, to evangelize the world, beginning with the people who are close to us. This series is not specifically about that effort. This series is based on what lays behind that effort. The disciples were witnesses to the ministry, the lifestyle, the death and the resurrection of our Lord. That is, they saw what Jesus did, and how Jesus did or handled the circumstances in which HE found HIMSELF in each of those stages. They heard Jesus teach. They saw Jesus heal people who were sick. They heard and saw Jesus pray. They saw HIM extend HIS ministry to anyone and every one who was receptive to HIM. They saw HIM submit Himself to crucifixion. They saw HIM die. They saw HIM, three days later when HE

rose from the dead proclaiming the victory of God over sin and the worst it can do to us.

What this series is about, is that we too see God in action in the midst of our lives. We have walked with Jesus and talked with Jesus. Some of us know we have experienced HIS healing touch. We have tasted the power, the love, the sweetness of the presence of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of God and is poured out into us and upon us by the Father and the Son together. Like Israel, the nation of David and Moses we have seen that we are not alone, and that God touches the earth, and the waters of our troubles part, and we remain safe when others are destroyed by their circumstances. This series is about remembering what we have seen and heard. And for that reason, at this point I am taking a moment to summarize where we have been for the last 9 weeks.

The first Sunday we were unable to gather was Easter, April 12th. The message was in a nutshell, Jesus is alive! You have witnessed the real presence of our Lord. Part 2, was about the 10 lepers Jesus healed. It was a Gentile, not a Jew, who was the one who sought Jesus out to say, 'thank you for healing me'. Most of us are Gentiles (non Jews). We have been at ground zero on the score of a Gentile response to Jesus. In part 3, I point out at some length that self isolation is an ancient response to killer plagues. You have seen what staying home can do as a self defense against viral (untreatable) disease. In 2020, it is still the best non medicinal response to infection. It works! In part 4, Jesus said, "Blessed are the peace makers."

They are Christ-like. I said our Prime Minister had moved me. For the most part it has not been politics as usual. It has been about saving lives. Our leaders have really tried “getting along with one another,” for the greater good of all. In part 5, I tried to share the reality that eternal life is not just about heaven in the future, but walking with God and our neighbours here and now. We have seen these things happen. Part 6, we visited Psalm 22. It begins with the loss of hope. But then it turns to the fact of our life experience: we were born at precisely the right moment. And we were nursed by mother’s who loved us. Trust God and never lose hope. This plague will come to an end. “It is no secret (you’ve seen) What HE’s done for others, HE’ll do for you.” Pt 7 I shared with you a very personal detail of how I came to a life of ministry... “I heard the voice that Moses heard in the burning bush covered with flames and yet not reduced to ashes.” You have been able to watch me in sickness and in health, in good times and hard times. You know what you have seen. Part 8 was a moment with Jeremiah, buying a field occupied by a conquering army that in fact won the war. “Why’d he do dat?” Because there would come a time when the exile would return home, the field would once again grow grain, we will get to worship and fellowship in our building. Will life be as it was? Not really. But we have seen that too. We have changed with the times. That is part of why we are still here. In part 9, last week, we shared a shade tree on a summer afternoon. It seems like such a small detail of a big life. But it is a precious detail. God created trees and corn and potatoes. And we have seen how lovely and delicious those things can be. So Where are we today?

Today we are at Part 10. And the series is not over. Part 10 is "Praise the Lord!" (Psalm 106:1 and 48). Now, you could throw those words back at me and remind me that I said last week, one of the things about returning to the sanctuary, (when we do) will probably be no singing. I can hear John McGurk groaning. Sorry to pick on John, but like me, Ron, Wally and Jim (the guys in the choir) John loves singing as much as I do. I would rather sing than do almost anything else...except lead worship in front of my congregation. I learn everytime Barbara and I go anywhere in the car that, I have been singing too much, when she leans over and turns on the radio. I sing when I am cutting the lawn. I sing when I walk. And if I do not sing, I hum, or I whistle. I will have music in my life! And I especially enjoy singing the praise of the Lord our God. Jesus loves me. What a friend I have in Jesus. Gentle Shepherd. It's a long list.

I want you to understand that when we do get back to the sanctuary, and Sherry plays the music, I will find it "tres difficile," to stay silent. To just think the words. Or follow along the words of the praise book. OOPS! Not supposed to use a praise book. As I said this is going to be hard. My initial reaction was, "I won't enjoy worshipping like that!" I was praying, when I heard a wee small voice that irritated me, (Did David hold a praise book when he praised me?) Of course not. Hymn books and chorus books are modern inventions based on the technology of the printing press. The Lord sometimes

irritates me with the clarity of HIS logic. I wanted to reply, “I like what I like.” But I knew better.

Praise the Lord! That is what David wrote. That is what the Holy Spirit inspired him to write. In Psalm 106 the Spirit of God inspired him to make it, his first declaration and his last word on the subject. And he did not need to make a sound to do it. Isn't that fascinating? Listen to the music, maybe remember just a few lines or even phrases, and whisper them mentally into the ear of God who knows everything we think. Nothing is hidden to HIM. I won't get to hear myself sing. OOOPS! It's not supposed to be about me...is it. Notice that wasn't a question. I know, I know better. And I really know better than to add....but I don't have to like it.

Guess what is in between those two declarations of “Praise the Lord!” in Psalm 106. David reviews the experience of the Hebrew people becoming Israel. Remember that Joseph's people went to Egypt during a time of famine. It was where a gifted administrator had led an effort to prepare for the famine while it was still on the drawing board of history. There were barns full of food in Egypt. Joseph's people chose to go there to survive. And in the midst of the experience and even before the experience of the famine hit, they sinned. And they bred like rats. Egypt's wealthy and privileged became fearful the Hebrew's would outnumber and even take over Egypt. He recalls the miracles of God when Moses led the people out of Egypt. Deliverance (what other word could you use?).... Deliverance at the Red Sea. The wipe out of Egypt's

elite charioteers. They saw it happen. The waters parted. Horse and rider were swept away. They escaped safe and sound, and dry, on the other side.

For a while they believed the promises of God and praised HIS holy name. But then they got fed up on the feed they were having of bread and chicken. They remembered the onions they had eaten in Egypt...delicious, hot, eye watering onions! Story after story, David recalls the rebelliousness of the free Hebrews. They wanted what they had had because they were certain it was better back there, and they were no longer sure God was even real. Sounds like much of the world in 2019. I'm just saying.... It is so easy to love to hear your own voice and hold a book of 830 selections rather than "Praise the Lord!" because of what you have seen HIM do. We have seen HIM see us through the plague of our time. I am sure there are Presbyterians who have caught it, and died of it. In the 8500 who have passed away there must be at least 1 Presbyterian. Why have we been spared? Why are you and I still here? Why are the people in our circle who are older and have compromised immune systems still sitting up and taking nourishment and digging with post hole augers and gardening, chopping wood? Given what we have seen, is it not right, the right thing to do, to praise the Lord? And if we gather with others, knowing how this virus spreads, through droplets of moisture expelled when we breathe...is it not right, the right thing to do, to praise the Lord without hearing our own voices saying the words?

Rev. Rebekah (my daughter) makes me feel like a piker. She has sent her people a blog daily since mid March when Covid-19 befell the Canadian consciousness. She has done video services for her people from the couch in her apartment every Sunday. She has self-isolated and kept active. Cared for her parents and her big brother. And participated in her Presbytery and her Ministerial. Praising the Lord is more than singing out loud. And David, (blessed David) the Psalm writer brackets Israel's being in the wilderness with that one phrase repeated. "Praise the Lord!"

I think that is the way to get through this. I think that is the way to find hope when all seems hopeless. Take, receive, life as it unfolds upon you. Receive what is served up by time and circumstance, and say with another Old Testament prophet... "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!" Do it in word. Do it in deed. And when necessary do it in silence. "Praise the Lord!" To this as well as everything else we have listed...you are once again...witnesses. You have seen it with your eyes and heard it with your ears. Again I say, (and you can't hear my voice) "Praise the Lord!"

Let us pray.

Lord we are tired. And we are weary. And yet we must go on. Be with us in the moments of temptation that do come and will come, when we are tempted to just do things as the world does. Help us to remember the inheritance to which we are heirs thanks to you, thanks to your love and grace and

sustaining presence. Grant that we may see a time when we can sing with gusto as we used to do. In the meantime let us be stirred by music that we hear and the witness of those who make it, who would have us remember that there is no circumstance and no time and no condition when we should forget or set aside the praising of YOUR HOLY Name. Praise belongs to you O God. Amen