

August 2, 2020 We Are Witnesses Pt. 15 Psalm 89:1

Dearly Beloved;

During this past week there were several days when the new cases of Covid-19 slipped into two digit numbers in Ontario. Yes, the numbers spiked back up over a hundred, but there were reasons for that and the city of Toronto, remained very low on the overall scale. I also had drawn to my attention (Barbara and her I Phone) that Canada now ranks so low on the pandemic list of nations that it does not appear on the top 15 nations at all. That is really good, and underscores that we are doing some things right...especially among the over 40 crowd. I simply want to encourage you to continue to be cautious. Wash hands, socially distance when you are out and about (six feet apart), mask when indoors or in crowded conditions, use hand sanitizer, and really consider whether you need to go somewhere where you will not be in control of the conditions or other people's activity. Please be careful.

Barbara and I continue to be well. On Wednesday of this coming week Rebekah will be returning to Toronto, and to Graceview Church, her holidays being over. I request your prayers for her because a city is a dangerous place to be in the midst of any plague, just because of the possibilities. Barbara and I will be continuing to spend as much time as we are able to, at the farmhouse. That is the safest place for us, simply because it takes us outside a number of social loops. Socially isolating remember, is the key to dealing with disease for which there is no preventive medication or vaccine.

There are individuals who are part of our fellowship who are coping with serious illness not related to Covid-19. I am asking you to pray for them. There are individuals like Barbara who are now on lists waiting for specific dates for surgical treatment. Pray for them during the time of waiting. Pray for them during the upcoming surgeries. Pray for their families who cannot help but be nervous during these times in the midst of all the challenges of 2020.

With that I will conclude this pastoral note reminding you that I pray for you and for your loved ones. May God watch over you and every step you take.

The first verse of Psalm 89 should ring a couple of bells for all of us. "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations." (KJV) I quoted that from the King James Version for a reason. Literally, those are the words to a chorus, # 84 in the Master Chorus Book. We have sung it together many, many times as part of the Celebration of Praise at St. Andrew's. Somehow our pew Bibles (NIV) translation of, "I will sing of the Lord's great love forever," just doesn't roll off the tongue quite so easily.

As memory serves, I was in Grade 6 when I went to the Public Library in downtown Port Arthur (now Thunder Bay), got myself a library card, and borrowed the book "Last of the Mohicans," by James Fenimore Cooper. Somewhere I had stumbled across the information that this was regarded as the first great American novel. Actually it was

not even published in America at the beginning of its career. Cooper was trying to make an entry into the field of writing in a time when English newspapers published novels a chapter at a time, a prime source for reading material in an age when public libraries were few and far between. Another great English author who succeeded in building his reputation as an author this way was Charles Dickens. Many of his novels first appeared in serial form in the newspapers of London before they were published as “books” for sale. Cooper was at the time greeted with greater favour in London than he was in America. For one thing, Americans new that the accurate tribal name of the “Mohicans” was the Mohawk people. And Americans also knew they were not becoming an extinct tribe either. The English public on the other hand, was fascinated with a tale of war and peace being fought out in the wilderness of the colonies.

There are two main characters among the frontiersmen in the book: Hawkeye, also known as la longue carabine, (long rifle). His reputation has been made as a trapper, and hunter. The second key character is the Psalm Singer. When it came to making movies based on the book, the character of Hawkeye and the Psalm Singer tend to melt into one.

I mention this because I am somewhat like the Psalm Singer. I have trouble being silent. When I drive I hum or whistle or I sing. I do not think about doing it. On the contrary I discover I have been doing it only after I have been singing the

same song or the same verse over and over and over. Barbara sends me a signal by leaning over and turning on the radio. Any sound she says is better than that one tune or verse repeated and repeated. Even when I walk I have a tendency to hum or whistle. Actually I hear music in my head, and I (this is my claim) just have to join in.

One of the most famous Books of the Bible is the result of a Psalm Singer. Of course I am referring to King David. His hits include “The Lord Is My Shepherd,” “O Lord, Our Lord, How Excellent IS Thy Name In All The Earth,” and Psalm 89... “I Will Sing Of The Mercies Of The Lord Forever, I Will Sing...I Will Sing.” And a 147 others. You have heard them sung, and you have heard them read. And like today, on more than one occasion they have provided a verse or a phrase that has been the basis of a full length dissertation called, the sermon.

I draw to your attention that you have witnessed this phenomenon. There are among us individuals who would sooner sing than talk. Individuals for whom songs of praise just roll off the tongue, and like some proverbial mind worm (that’s a new phrase I have learned which describes a song lyric you cannot get out of your mind,) which usually is accompanied by a fascinating and addictive tune-/rhythm. It has become my strategy of last resort to defend myself for singing and humming a few lines of a hymn or chorus, repeatedly as blaming it for being a “mind worm.”

If you ask me how long I have had this tendency to sing, sing, sing, hum or whistle, until someone would turn on the radio to drown me out, I would have to admit it predates my learning to play a musical instrument like the guitar or banjo. It has been going on for most of my life. In fact I think I remember being addicted to making musical sounds before I came to faith. In that era, it was most likely something like, “I ride an old paint/Lead an old dan/I’m going to Montana/ To throw the hooliyan” and I took my inspiration from the likes of a young Johnny Cash. When I came to faith, it did not take long for so called “Gospel music” to replace my addiction to “Country.” So, yes, I am a Psalm singer.

Worship choruses like those in the Master Chorus Book, are for me a steady diet. And while I still sing the occasional country song, I have come to recognize with the help of friends like Sherry Mayhew the close relationship between Country and Gospel Music. One of the things she has pointed out to choir members back in the days before Covid-19 is the inevitable key change that usually comes before the last verse and chorus of a number, or at least what becomes the last movement of the piece. When I was very young I would look for the change in key that would be part of a Country song. For any of you who remember the “Gunfighter Ballads” of Marty Robbins (the title of a vinyl LP Album in my youth) there were some songs, (Cash did this too) where there was a key change for every verse! “I Walk The Line” is a really good example of Cash’s work in this regard.

By now you are probably asking what all this has to do with anything important. It is simply this. You cannot have been part of the church's praise life without noticing there are "Psalm Singers" among us. People who have a measure of musical talent and who enjoy the words and the music so much they cannot refrain from "making a joyful noise." I also call it "the David bug." Remember David was first of all a shepherd. His first audience as he played his harp and sang his earliest "songs" or Psalms was a flock of sheep. As a soldier he learned to carry the weapons of his trade, but also carried his harp and continued to compose and entertain himself with his "sacred songs." As a King, and the greatest King of Israel, he continued to celebrate his faith in music and words. You have witnessed that phenomenon.

Eugene used to like my guitar playing. Jim would remind me from time to time, that it had been a while since I had played my banjo. And they both expected me to sing when I did play either one. "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord, forever. I will sing. I will sing." Some of us just find it hard to keep that sort of thinking inside. Even when we try to do so, it bubbles out of us, as the "Texas tea," bubbled out of the ground of "Jed Clampet." You have heard it. You have seen it. You are witnesses. Let us pray.

Lord we thank you for the music that accompanies and colours our faith in YOU. Bless us and continue to bless us with melodies that make us mindful of the words of praise songs. Grant that we may hear the harmonies that are part of the

praise life of the church not only in a time such as this is, but that have also been passed on to us from other generations and other times. Some of us get emotional just thinking of Queen Victoria rising to her feet as the Choir sang the Hallelujah Chorus. Music bears our souls and hearts through tough and rough waters bringing to mind lyrics that affirm what we believe, and therefore shape how we will live, and even die. Lord, we praise YOU that YOU raise up Psalm Singers among us for they turn our voices toward you in time of need. Hear our prayers for those who wrestle with illness or have surgery in their future days. Heal their wounds and give them new found strength. In Jesus name we ask this. Amen