

April 11, 2021 The Aftermath Psalm 19

Dearly Beloved;

I am tempted to begin this note to you by simply saying I am back. I recorded the video of the Maundy Thursday, Communion From The Dining Room Table, on the Wednesday of Holy Week. I fully expected to lead in person worship in the sanctuary on the Thursday Evening and Easter service on April 4th. I was ambulated to Belleville Hospital in the wee hours of the Thursday morning in terrific pain. The Hospital relieved me of the pain, while I was there but was unable to isolate the problem. Then Premier Ford announced his intention to lock down Ontario. Grasping the seriousness of the Provincial situation, I and the Clerk of Session made the decision to cease in person worship for the duration of the lockdown. In the wee hours of Easter morning I made my second trip by ambulance to the Hospital. I was out by noon, with antibiotics to treat a urinary tract infection. Since then I have seen my Cancer Surgeon, Dr. Woods, and have begun a battery of scans and tests to get a handle on my condition. My system responded positively and almost immediately to the antibiotics. It has been my position since 2015, that you should know, what my family knows, about my health. Thank you for your concern, the cards, and the prayers.

Once again we are in lockdown. As of this day (April 10th) there are 3800 new cases of Covid-19 in Ontario. While we have been spared the frightening numbers of Toronto, and the outbreaks in Kingston, we have continued to have a steady trickle of new cases. By the way, not only have I

been vaccinated (March 24th) during my hospital visit on April 1st I had my first up the nose Covid test, which was negative. My point is that our caution is well warranted, and is part of the pledge I made that I would do my best, to keep you safe. The message for the 11th will appear in script form on the web page, as will the link for the video of The Sermon From The Dining Room Table. Next Sunday Wally Mayhew will be providing the script of the message. There will be no video, and I will be resting. God willing I will be back in place and doing what I do, the following week.

For the second year in a row, we have been unable to spend Easter in the sanctuary at 110 Mill Street. The Covid-19 Pandemic has been the major reason for both of those service cancellations. I want to begin by saying we all know what Easter is about. In the season of the Passover, for the Jewish community, which always occurs in the Spring of the year, Jesus arrived at the gates of city of Jerusalem. The city was teeming with pilgrims: Jews who had travelled the marvelous Roman Road system, in order to celebrate in the Holy City.

From the Sunday of HIS arrival, to the Thursday evening when HE was arrested, Jesus spent his time in Jerusalem teaching the crowds that gathered to HIM, on the steps of the Temple. He spent time on the Mount of Olives. He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. All of those five days, the pressure was building. On the Thursday evening the inevitable happened. A party of Temple Guards under the direction of the

High Priest, arrested Jesus. Judas, one of the 12 disciples, that inner circle of the crowd that followed Jesus made a deal, and sold Jesus to HIS accusers for 30 pieces of silver.

Over the next 24 hours, Jesus was tried by the Sanhedrin, the Rabbinical Council of Jerusalem. HE was tried by Herod. Finally HE was tried by the Roman Procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate. Pilate issued the death sentence, and execution order, and after being whipped, a process involving great blood loss, (modern doctors have estimated that Jesus lost up to 50 percent of HIS blood supply by volume) before HE was crucified. These facts explain why Jesus was unable in fact to carry the cross beam all the way to Calvary, and why HE died in such a short time on the cross itself. On the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Suffering, HE was literally a dead man walking.

As the Apostle's Creed summarizes in so few words... "HE was crucified, dead, and buried,...the third day HE rose again, from the dead." Three days Jesus was in the tomb. And then everything changed. Absolutely everything. The histories, the Gospel accounts, involve the confessions of the writers that Jesus closest friends, the 11 remaining disciples, did not believe it. The women in that crowd of 120 Mary, Jesus mother, Mary Magdalene, and one Salome, testified they had found the tomb open, the stone rolled away, and that an angel of God, told them HE was risen. In fact the instruction was that the women should go and tell the disciples He was risen, just as HE had said would occur.

And that is precisely why I chose to read Psalm 19, and to address you based on what it teaches. When we want to learn about what Jesus did and what Jesus was about we tend to turn to the Gospels. Matthew was one of the 12 disciples. Luke was a doctor, a physician, who was part of the gathering of believers, and who became the travel companion and personal physician to the Apostle Paul. Mark was a teenager related to Simon Peter. And John was, in that circle of 12 disciples, the closest friend Jesus ever made. He describes himself as that disciple whom Jesus loved. Their friendship was so profound, Jesus called upon John to take care of HIS mother, because without help she would be alone, and financially destitute. Jesus called upon HIS mother, to forge a relationship with John such that he would now be her son.

What does Psalm 19 tell us. “the law of the Lord is perfect it revives the soul.” The King James Version translates vs. 7 as “it converts the soul.” One of the questions we tend to ask, especially when we read the Book of Acts, in the New Testament, written by the physician Luke, is “What happened that the disciples became apostles, commissioned and sent out to tell the world about Jesus?” They were afraid for their lives. And then they just don’t seem to care about the fact that the world is a hostile environment to people who follow Jesus. Of course the answer to that question is really simple. Jesus rose from the dead on the 3rd day. And the accounts that prophesied that would occur, the words of Jesus regarding his dying and rising again, were verified, that is, made true by what happened. And remember this. Without the resurrection of

Jesus, there is no apostle Paul, the greatest evangelist to the Gentile world in all of time. These Gospel accounts are perfect. Just what the doctor ordered. What they declare revives and converts the souls of men and women, boys and girls. The Gospel accounts are the truth about Jesus. That is their power. They change lives. Yours, mine, anyone who takes them seriously. "The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy." That is the second half of verse 7 of Psalm 19.

Even the church has been tempted from time to time, to fail to take the Gospel accounts seriously, trusting rather the wisdom of men, to question all things, rather than the wisdom of God. And there is a final phrase in verse 7 of Psalm 19. Not only are the statutes of the Lord trustworthy, they make the simple ordinary people, wise beyond their wits and their education.

Why did Matthew, Mark, Luke and John write their accounts about Jesus? Not one of them starts out saying something like, I'm going to tell you the life story of Jesus. Each of those authors writes from a unique perspective. Scholars talk about the fact that they borrow from one another, and give accounts that are different from one another. There is a singular exception to that otherwise sensible interpretation. When they get down to the last of their weaving histories they tell us the same story. Jesus arrived in Jerusalem where HE was arrested, brutalized, crucified under Roman Law because only the Romans could pronounce and carry out capital punishment. When Jesus was taken from the cross HE was dead. HE was buried. And the 3rd day, HE rose from the dead. HE was seen

by 120 in the upper room. HE met the 11 in Galilee. And the disciples lives, including Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were transformed.

“The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.” One of the things I am sorry about is that I missed Easter two times during this pandemic. It is a day in which marvelous joy pervades every detail of the worship in which we participate. God got it right. In Jesus HE saves us from the grim realities of life...like pain, sickness, and death. And it happened. It really happened.

What was it Paul wrote in the letter to the Hebrews? “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” (Hebrews 11:1) And it was by the power of faith in Jesus Christ risen from the dead that the disciples of Jesus time and the disciples of Jesus in our time, continue to bring light and hope and joy and peace to a world that hungers and thirsts for those very things.

A few years back I discovered a little book by an American Presbyterian preacher, John Ortberg. The short title is, “Who Is This Man?” The subtitle is, The Unpredictable Influence of the Inescapable Jesus. Here is the point that Ortberg makes. The day people die, their influence over anyone and among their circle of friends begins to diminish and passes away. Other than a handful of scholars, few people are interested in the words of Marcus Aurelius. If the name lives on, influence diminishes. The truth is Jesus influences more

lives today than HE ever did in Galilee or Jerusalem, or for that matter Tarsus. How do you explain that? A few will say the Church is a powerful institution. I have a tendency to reply, you haven't been to church recently if you believe that! For those who believe we do not say, Jesus Christ was Lord. We say Jesus Christ is Lord. Because HE is alive. And HE still changes lives.

Let us pray;

Lord we need YOU. O we need YOU. In fact every hour, we need YOU. Touch our lives with the power of YOUR Spirit. In YOUR singular, powerful name we ask. Amen