

July 25, 2021 What Are We To Make Of All This? Psalm 90

Dearly Beloved;

Today (Sunday) we are beginning once again to hold in person worship services. The service is abbreviated because indoor spaces are still more dangerous than outdoor spaces. To those who will not be attending I want to say, I understand your anxiety about gathering with a crowd or a group of people. I will not pretend that I am not anxious because I am, in spite of the fact that I have had my 2 shots of vaccine weeks ago. When you do feel like attending do not be shy. No one is thinking ill of you for being cautious. You will be remembered in our prayers, as beloved members of the flock of God.

For the foreseeable future we will be masking and Covid-19 procedures will be in place. The script for the sermon will continue to appear on the Church web page, as will the link for "The Sermon From The Dining Room Table". It is my prayer that these tools will provide the opportunity to continue to assist you in your journey of faith. We will not be singing at our services. Rev. J. P. Smitt, in the employ of our Synod, has been extremely helpful to ministers like myself, staying on top of recommended best practices, and boiling them down for work in our congregational settings. He will sound alarms if there is a change in what we should be doing to remain as safe as possible. I expect he will sound the "all clear" when we can safely go back to singing hymns and choruses out loud. I long for that day as do most of you. I am trying to be patient.

In the meantime services will be approximately 30 to 40 minutes long, including the celebration of the sacraments as they occur. I am anticipating our next communion service will be at the beginning of October, and there will be specific announcements about that as time unfolds.

This is important. It is always possible there could be another or number of other waves of Covid-19. As business revs up, travel resumes, and international travel occurs, we will all have to be careful and cautious. I assure you I will not risk your safety if cases begin to spike in Ontario, or communities around us. May God bless you as we journey into a strange new future. Let us turn to the Word for this day.

The journey we have been on since mid-March of 2020 has been difficult and in many ways, frightening. I have lost sleep every time we have had to make a decision regarding the suspension of in-person worship services. And I have lost sleep every time we have considered the question of starting up, live worship experiences.

I have been leading congregations in worship since August the 1<sup>st</sup> 1969, a total of 52 years. The first 3 of those years I was a student minister attending Knox College. I was ordained in 1972 on the last day of August in my home community of Port Arthur, before it and Fort William were amalgamated to form the city of Thunder Bay in Northwestern Ontario. I began a doctorate programme of study while ministering in New Liskeard in 1980 and got my 3<sup>rd</sup> degree in

1985. Nothing in all of that time, study, or experience prepared me for what we have faced since March 13<sup>th</sup> of 2020, to the present.

I had no experience of the church being unable to meet for public worship until I entered this new world with you. I have made a number of decisions with fear and trembling, trying to figure out if I was being too worried, because I am for the most part a man who believes. On the other hand, I have worried every time we have resumed a form of worship, that I was putting lives at risk...it will sound foolish...but I have not worried about myself. I have worried about Barbara. I have worried about what I would do, or could do without her. I have worried about you. About the future and the present of St. Andrew's Stirling. And I have worried about what I would do if I had to face God and explain, if as your shepherd, I brought you to harm. For the first time in my life I begin to understand what the apostle was talking about when he used the phrase, "working out my salvation with fear and trembling." Been there. Done that in real time.

Hence the question: What are we to make of all of this? The 4 million plus lives lost to a disease, caused by a virus we cannot even see with our God given eyes. The thousands of Canadians who have died, who the day before their symptoms became obvious, were relatively healthy. The hundreds and hundreds of seniors who perished in Nursing Homes and Assisted Living Environments, who received care at the hand of others, until the system came apart at the seams.

This morning, I am trying to share with you what I think I have come to understand about the Pandemic, that began (for us) in the early Spring of 2020, and which is not over as we gather in this place this morning. I chose to read Psalm 90 this morning. I believe what it says more strongly than I did a year ago. For me, it makes sense, in circumstances that are difficult to understand and hard to cope with. It is my prayer, and my hope you will be encouraged by what this Psalm says in plain English.

“Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.” Adam believed in his Creator. God walked with him, and talked with him, in the first garden on Earth. And Adam discovered that sin has real power to mess up our lives, our environment and every aspect of our lives. We have seen the reality that Adam discovered. Do not misunderstand. I am not for a moment saying “you brought this on yourselves.” I am saying sin is real. We live in an imperfect world. Things go wrong for which the creation was not programmed. We have witnessed what it is like to live with chaos. And yes, sinfulness, breeds chaos.

What I believe is that in our generation, we have tried and tried hard, to dwell in the Lord God who made us, to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God who refreshes us, every morning we awaken from sleep. I believe that God gave His Son Jesus, into the world, and for the world, by which I genuinely mean, Jesus saves people, you, me and our

neighbours from the sins that would otherwise destroy us. There has never been a generation of mankind in which someone has not bent their knees to pray, or sat to pray, or stood to pray, to the ONE true God, whom we know and have been known by, in Jesus Christ. Lord you have been our dwelling place in all the generations of our kind, right down to the present moment.

And this is an important and significant insight: He who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, “brought forth the earth and the world” before there were mountains, or plains or seas. The Scripture says, suddenly there was a beginning. The Scripture says life appeared. Lesser forms gave rise to more complex forms. Mankind, men and women, boys and girls became. The Big Bang Theory supports what the Scripture teaches. It is evident that human species as we know it has not been around for a long time. I don’t care what timeline you use. I believe God created us, cares for us and sustains us, and saves us in the midst of many, many, crises.

But there is something about the nature of God that is not true of human beings. We are limited in our life spans. God is not. The Psalm 90 says it well... “From everlasting to everlasting, you are God.” What does that mean? It means that God existed from eternity, before Creation occurred. And it means that when a person tries to understand the future, God will still be God, His Holy Spirit will still breathe upon the waters, Jesus will still be known by the created order,

regardless of what happens to us or for that matter, the Earth, or the sun, or the stars.

So where are we? We are carving out answers about God and life and eternity, according to Psalm 90. I hope you will stay tuned, and consider what I am saying. I believe. I believe, God is still God, in spite of Covid-19, and all that we have witnessed in our time and our times. There are profound insights in this Psalm we call Psalm 90. God was. And God is. And God will be. Because unlike us HE is God, the ONE who is almighty, the One who taps us on the shoulder, and we suddenly notice HE is present. (By the way, it was not I, but a Presbyterian preacher in the U.S., named Peter Marshall, who invented the phrase “tapped on the shoulder,” as his way of describing the experience of being called to faith by the God who has been our dwelling place.) And God saves. HE does. Jesus saves us. HE did and HE does. You and I are still here. Remember that. Because we got to be here, by the grace of God who is God from everlasting to everlasting.

And yes...in case you are wondering, we are in a series. Next week, by whatever means is necessary, “What Are We To Make Of This” Part 2.

Let us pray;

Lord God our Creator, Holy Spirit, our Comforter, Jesus, our Saviour, we thank YOU for the truth we discover and are surprised by, in YOUR word, in these times. Bless us with YOUR presence. Accompany us through minutes, hours and

days that try our souls. Restore our souls and refresh our hearts. In Jesus precious name we pray. Amen