

LETTER TO KNOX CHURCH FAMILY

JUNE 5, 2020

Once again, I offer blessings to all of you, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord!

And, once again, I hope that you are staying well and being safe as we are dealing with the Covid19.

Over the past week, I have been watching sometimes with anger, frustration, sorrow and so many other feelings, the unrest around this world and particularly as a result of what happened in the country to the south of us. It has made me stop and think particularly of my actions and thoughts around racism. Yes, it does exist; not only in America but here in this country as well. We are all God's children; not matter our colour of race. Let us pray that we can show God's love to each and everyone we meet.

As you already have heard we lost one of our family this week. Brian Myers went to be with our Lord. He was a very private guy with little to say but could he ever whistle! I am going to miss his whistling on Sundays as part of the Praise Team. Our prayers go out Sue and her family as they mourn the loss of a brother, uncle and more.

There is much speculation as to when churches will open and what has to be done before that can happen. There is a very good resource on the Presbyterian Church in Canada website. It outlines some of the issues that will need to be addressed.

The Session will begin to have some conversations about this in the near future.

Your Presbytery had an informal meeting last week on Zoom and we will have our regular via Zoom on June 16.

Here is my musical tribute this week.

The group Casting Crowns does a great version "GOOD GOOD FATHER".

<https://youtu.be/2gSugruC1jQ>

Take care.

Barb

CALL TO WORSHIP

Psalm 8

¹ O LORD, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!

Your glory is higher than the heavens.

² You have taught children and infants

to tell of your strength,^[b]

silencing your enemies

and all who oppose you.

³ When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—
the moon and the stars you set in place—

⁴ what are mere mortals that you should think about them,
human beings that you should care for them?^[c]

⁵ Yet you made them only a little lower than God^[d]
and crowned them^[e] with glory and honor.

⁶ You gave them charge of everything you made,
putting all things under their authority—

⁷ the flocks and the herds
and all the wild animals,

⁸ the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea,
and everything that swims the ocean currents.

⁹ O LORD, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, we remember your promise, that if we ask, we will receive, and that if we knock, the door will be opened. So, we ask that You will enlighten our minds and warm our hearts this morning. We ask that You will give us new courage in facing whatever difficulties may lie ahead in the days before us. We ask that You will stand by us in this hour and in all the hours of our lives. Yes Lord, we ask your blessing upon us.

O Lord, in the quietness of this time, help us to release our fears and anxieties. Enable us to leave behind our jealousies and our hurt feelings. Remove from our minds the petty concerns that distract us. Help us to focus on that which is holy, and which is full of hope. As we continue to be isolated and not able to worship together in person, keep us strong in our faith as we face the struggles and the trials set before us.

Be with those who are struggling and have lost hope; may they know the presence of Your love and care. As we sit here in our relative safe and comfortable places, we think of those around this world who do not have such a place. Comfort and guide them as well.

We ask that your presence may be felt among us this morning as we worship and praise Your name.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

AMEN

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-31

1 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

3 A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.

5 And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

6 A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.

7 The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass.

8 The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."

2 You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"

¹⁰ See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.

¹¹ He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

¹² Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?

¹³ Who can fathom the Spirit^[d] of the Lord, or instruct the Lord as his counselor?

¹⁴ Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge, or showed him the path of understanding?

¹⁵ Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.

¹⁶ Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings.

¹⁷ Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing.

¹⁸ With whom, then, will you compare God? To what image will you liken him?

¹⁹ As for an idol, a metalworker casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it.

²⁰ A person too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot; they look for a skilled worker to set up an idol that will not topple.

²¹ Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded?

²² He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

23 He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.

24 No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

25 “To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One.

26 Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

27 Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God”?

28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

29 He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

30 Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;

31 but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

ISAIAH 40 COMFORT FOR GOD’S PEOPLE

The book of Isaiah is divided into two parts. The first 39 chapters deal with impending judgment, and the second part deals with forgiveness and deliverance. The first 39 chapters deal with sin, but the last 27 chapters deal with a Saviour: 66 chapters in all. Many people see the book of Isaiah as a small Bible, for there are 39 chapters in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament: 66 books in all. The Old Testament often deals with the sin of the people of Israel, and the New Testament deals with the Saviour which came from Israel. There is a distinctly different tone and message beginning here in chapter 40. The first 39 chapters had warned of the destruction of the nation and the deportment of the people to foreign lands. The people had abandoned their God and he would now abandon them. The first part of the book is heavy and plodding but beginning with this chapter the

language soars with majestic eloquence and wondrous hope. As Isaiah wrote the first part of his book, disaster had not yet come to the nation. People had grown tired of Isaiah's warnings and his constant talk of their need of repentance and a return to God. But Isaiah wrote the second half of his book to the people of Israel and Judah who would be in exile. They would be taken away to Babylon. He was prophesying about a time that was yet to come when the nation would be destroyed. Jerusalem and its beautiful temple would be laying in ruins, and the people would be in captivity. In captivity they would not need to hear about pending judgment, because they would be living it. They would not need to be reminded of their sins; they would be experiencing the consequences of them on a daily basis.

There were three things which Isaiah would have to say to the people, and the first was: Isaiah spoke of an everlasting comfort. What they would need as captive slaves in Babylon was comfort. They did not need Isaiah to shake the finger at that point and say, "I told you so"; they needed to hear that God still cared for them and that there was hope. And that is the word that came from God to Isaiah, ***"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins"*** (Isaiah 40:1-2).

It is interesting that the Hebrew word Isaiah uses for comfort is also a word which can be translated "repent." The word is *nâham*, and its root has the idea of breathing deeply. It can therefore mean to breathe deeply with sorrow for your sin, or to breathe deeply as you comfort and console someone. The idea is that God's comfort comes as a result the people's repentance. Because they have breathed deeply in repentance, God has breathed deeply as He consoled and comforted them.

Isaiah had said to them, "in repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength," and now they were finally ready to receive it. Their sins had been paid for and deliverance was in the air. But this was not the result of what the people had done. This was the work of God. It was undeserved, unmerited favour. God was coming to them to deliver them, but first the way had to be prepared. In his vision, Isaiah heard a voice calling and saying, ***"A voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken'"*** (Isaiah 40:3-5).

God was coming to them, and the call was going out to prepare his way. In ancient times, when there were no superhighways, history tells us that months before a king's entourage would set out on a journey, the call would go before him: "Prepare the way for the king. Make a straight way in the wilderness and a highway for the king." The people would run before the king to remove any obstacles and fill in the rough places in his path. They would build a road and fill in small valleys and dig through the hills so the king's progress would be smooth and unhindered. Their reward was to see the king coming in all his royal splendour. In this passage, God is on His way to His people who are now in slavery to a foreign nation. He will come to them and deliver them from captivity, bringing them home on the highway which has been prepared for him. The picture is one of God coming in glory from Jerusalem to bring His people back to Himself and to their home. This was the great comfort the people longed for.

However, the idea of comfort here is not like the comfort we usually think of. When we think of comfort, we think of sitting on a beach watching the waves and drinking something cold and delicious while someone rubs oil all over our body. (That's me!!!) Or, if it is winter, we see ourselves sitting in a Lazy Boy recliner before a roaring fire. There is a comforter spread over us while we sip hot cocoa and read a book or watch our favourite movie. But the idea of comfort comes from the two Latin words: *com fortis*, literally translated it means "with strength." God's way of giving comfort is to give us the strength to do what needs to be done. As His strength comes, grief and sorrow go. The situation may not have changed, but we have a new ability to face it and deal with it. The people to whom Isaiah was speaking needed strength to face the journey home, and once there, they had the huge job of rebuilding the temple and the city. They were going to need a lot of strength and encouragement. The word encouragement has much the same idea: it means to be in courage. If you are encouraged, you have the courage to do what needs to be done. God was comforting and encouraging the people so they would be able to carry out His will. Sometimes God's comfort comes by forcing us to change and grow. Someone has said that the Spirit of God comes to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

Someone once asked a paratrooper how many times he had jumped out of the plane while he was in the military. He said, "None." His friend said, "What do you mean, 'none,' I thought you were a paratrooper?" He said, "I was, but I never jumped. I was pushed several times... but I never jumped." That is what the military calls encouragement. Sometimes we need a little shove. But along with the shove, God gives us renewed courage and strength to do what He is calling us to do. In the end, it becomes something we want to do.

The other way that God comforted the people was by letting them know He would take care of their enemies. The kingdom of Babylon looked so formidable. No one

would be able to get through their walls or defeat their army. The splendour of Babylon was breathtaking with its magnificent buildings and hanging gardens. No one could imagine the possibility of Babylon being destroyed. But God assured them, ***“All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:6-8).***

God was saying that no matter how powerful the Babylonians appeared, they were but grass. He determined their time and place, and when He blew upon them it would be like the hot desert wind blowing on the desert flowers. They would wither and fall, but he would remain.

And that is exactly what happened. The Babylonians who seemed so powerful were actually defeated without much of a fight. They thought nothing could happen to them. They were so sure they were safe that they did not even post a guard on the wall. But while their rulers drank themselves into oblivion, the Persian army simply diverted the flow of the Euphrates River, which flowed under the walls and through the great city. Then they marched right into Babylon on the empty riverbed (Daniel 5). The great kingdom of Babylon collapsed in a night. God proved that the people were like grass and that only He remains.

This is Isaiah’s second point. Not only did Isaiah speak of an everlasting comfort, Isaiah spoke of the everlasting Word of God. When all other claims to truth have had their say, the Word of God will stand alone in the end. Everything else changes. Philosophies come and go, but God’s Word remains the abiding Truth. The lie of the Nazi’s came and died. The lie of godless communism came and died.

Many philosophers and theologians have said and are still saying that God is dead and predicting the death of the church. Today almost no one can remember the names of those who made those predictions, let alone the titles of their books, but the church of Jesus Christ is thriving, and God is still very much alive.

A young musician once went to see his old music teacher. During the visit, his elderly mentor took a tuning fork and struck it on the end of the table. He said, “That is ‘A.’” From the floor above them they could hear the voice of a singer rehearsing. “She sings sharp,” the old teacher said with a smile. He struck the tuning fork again and paused as he lifted it and said, “She is sharp, but this ‘A’ — always has been, always will be; 440 vibrations per second. It will still be ‘A’ 5,000 years from now.”

This is God’s Word.

It was God's Word.

It is God's Word today, and it will be God's Word 5000 years from now.

Kingdoms will rise and fall. Ideas will come and go.

The values of the world will change, but God's Word will remain the one constant in a world of change and confusion.

Isaiah told of an everlasting comfort, and he told of the everlasting Word of God, but ***thirdly***: Isaiah spoke of an everlasting strength. Isaiah wrote: "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and His understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint" (Isaiah 40:28-31).

Those who were in exile lost hope, and because of that they lost their strength and desire to go on. Even the young were beaten down, weary and defeated. But those who placed their hope and trust in God did not lose heart, and they did not lose strength, regardless of their age. Their hearts and minds soared as they thought about what God was going to do. As new strength and courage entered their hearts it began to affect their bodies. They gained a new enthusiasm for life and a new strength to go on. But you never gain that strength unless you are willing to wait on the Lord.

We would all like to mount up with wings like eagles, but as someone has said, "It's hard to soar with the eagles when you are surrounded by turkeys." Actually, that is just a cop out. When God shows up it doesn't matter who is around you.

I read about a young boy who spent the summer with his grandfather. As he and his grandfather were out in the field one day, they found a small bird. It was strange looking, and they didn't know what it was at first. They named him Ernie and took him home to show to grandma. Grandma put him with a mother hen and her brood of chicks. As it turned out, Ernie was an Eaglet. It wasn't long until Ernie was larger than the chickens, and it was apparent he was different even though he had picked up some of the mannerisms of the chickens. But one sunny afternoon the father eagle saw Ernie eating corn down on the farm with some strange white birds. The father eagle began to soar in circles above the farm, and then began to spiral downward while calling out for Ernie. Ernie's head lifted as he heard something that resonated deep within him. Instinctively he began to spread

his wings. Suddenly he was flying, and he began to soar in response to his father's call. Ernie had within him the spirit of an eagle. The chicks heard the father eagle's call as well, but they only chirped in response and continued to eat their corn on the ground. But Ernie had a higher calling. He was destined to soar.

Chickens and turkeys can fly, but they rarely do because they are most comfortable on the ground. Sparrows and other small birds fly, but they mostly use their wings to get from one tree to another. But eagles soar. They have great power and freedom. They are destined for the skies. Like them, we have a different Spirit in us than those who are content to be ground dwellers. We have a higher calling. We are destined for the skies. God's Spirit is in us and He is calling to us to soar with Him. Just because we are Christians does not mean we are using our wings. We may still be more comfortable on the ground than soaring in the sky. We may even flit from one place to another, but God is calling us to soar. We do so by waiting on him. Responding to his call. Trusting him. Spreading our wings and using the strength He has given us.

Someone has said, "There are two lasting bequests we can give to children. One is roots; the other is wings." We can teach children that there is a strength that comes from God that is greater than our own. We can teach them to wait on Him and trust Him, even when everything looks hopeless. We can teach them that Isaiah wrote about an everlasting strength, an everlasting hope, an everlasting comfort, an everlasting truth, an everlasting kingdom, and an everlasting God. But the best thing we can do is to show them the reality of God's faithfulness as we model it in our lives.

We can be living examples of hope.

Living sources of comfort.

Living proof of the reliability of God's Word.

Living examples of a strength that comes from God.

We *can* mount up with wings like eagles.

Even in the midst of the turmoil of this present world, we must not give up hope because ***OUR GOD IS AN AWESOME GOD AND A COMFORTING GOD!***

Let us pray

Loving God, God of power and might source and end of all glory and light, we thank You for Your eternal presence; Your gentle guidance; Your overwhelming beauty; Your quiet whispers and Your powerful acts. We thank You God for those moments that come to us; those moments when You draw back the curtain that

separates us from You and allows us to see and realize Your majesty and Your power. Help us, O God, to make ourselves available for those moments. Teach us to stop and to listen, to pause and to look within ourselves for Your gentle presence and at the world around us for the signs that You leave for those who care to see. Strengthen within us, O God, the awareness that You are with us at every moment and grant to us not only the memory of the words of Christ as they are found in the scriptures, but allow us as well to hear His word within our own hearts at all times.

Lord we pray that You would show us how to be seen as Your children and give to us that which You desire us to have so that we may share that which You desire us to share. Cast out, O Lord, our fear and anxiety, our turmoil and our trouble, and make us to shine with the radiance of your loving presence.

Finally, Lord, we pray too for your church; and for Your people. Help us to welcome the gifts of those in our midst, and to dedicate our own gifts to You without regard to the amount or measure by which others serve You. Help everyone to see in us at Knox the reflection of Your glory and to hear from us the good news of Your love.

We ask all these things in the name of Christ Jesus, Ye who is our Lord and our brother, our judge and our friend and who taught us to pray saying:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen

BENEDICTION

Go in peace and care for one another in Christ's name and may God, whose embrace encompasses the universe and all that is in it, and Christ Jesus, who touched and healed the rich and the poor and the sinner and the saint, and the Holy Spirit, who comforts those who mourn and inspires those who are poor of Spirit, be with you all, both now and forevermore.

AMEN

