

**May God hold you in the palm of his hand.”**

Osler Mennonite:

Sunday, May 16, 2021

Scriptures: Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Psalm 139: 7-10

Song of Songs 2:10-13

Good morning. Welcome each and everyone to our time of worship. Whether you are at some distance from this place or here in this place of worship, welcome. We gather together on First Nations and Métis land. We gather in the presence of each other. We gather in the presence of the Lord.

This morning and every morning we are blessed. Blessed with sunrise. Blessed with the opportunity to greet a new day. A new day filled with unexpected blessings, and yes... possibly unwanted challenges.

Today we are blessed with the gift of music. Thank you to Dayna and Michelle. They agreed to bring us the gift of music that I had asked of them. For that I am grateful. And to Nora, thank you for the listening ear and the wisdom of scripture to study. There are others that make worship with each other possible each and every Sunday. Today, is somewhat of a Stefaniuk day. Vanessa shared the children's feature and Matthew is working the sound and video stream. Dayna sang. Zachary is preaching at Tiefengrund in Laird as he begins his pastoral time with that congregation. These humans demonstrated the blessings that are bestowed upon each and everyone of us.

There are times when we may not see the blessings in what life as a human brings our way. But in each there is a learning experience,... an experience that can help us to be more than we are. It can help us to be more... and provide more of what others may seek in order for them to feel blessed.

Today's duet May The Road Rise To Meet You may seem strange during the body of a service. It may seem better suited to a closing or benediction. That may be true, but as with many things there is more than one way to look at it or in this instance listen to and understand.

Blessings are welcome at any time and place. There is power in words of blessing. There can be freedom and affirmation for the receiver of the blessing. And for the speaker there may be feelings of joy as they share their thoughts... The human sharing the blessing speaks powerful words, words that may carry the receiver through yet uncharted territory.

The English teacher within me sees the words of the song not as lyrics but rather as poetry. Within poetry as within scripture there is much that can be learned. The important step is to open one's heart, mind and soul to the words of the poet.

In the song we learn of seasons,... summertime,...autumn,...winter...and spring. Each of the seasons may be viewed as a season of life. Seasons of life which may be interpreted as a journey. As you journey what will you encounter? Whom will you encounter? What will the interaction be like? For me this brings to mind the encounter between two disciples and,... at the moment an unrecognized human,... on the road to Emmaus. You never know who you will meet and the conversation that may result.

There will be many things that we encounter, some pleasant and joyful, others not. The passage from Ecclesiastes states that there is a time for everything. Verses 1 through 8 give us eight pairs of things which we may encounter over time. The NIV translation of scripture opens in this way, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.”

As we move into verse two we read, “a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot”. Within the song that brings us to spring, a time of warming sunshine and life giving rains. But all is not roses and sunshine. Because in Ecclesiastes we are told there will be “a time to uproot.” Within the song this is autumn and the winter of our lives. This may be seen as a time of endings. Rather than endings,...approach it as a time of new beginnings. With the changing of seasons, a new season is begun. Think of the unknown blessings that may come with this new time.

Scripture, as many know, is reflected in music. Not only in hymns or the song of blessing we listened to this morning. Today’s words from Ecclesiastes have inspired song writers. In 1959 Pete Seeger wrote “To Everything There Is a Season” also known as “Turn!, Turn!. Turn!”. The song consists of the first eight verses of chapter 3. The lines of the song, just as the scripture, are open to interpretation, but Seeger’s song presents them as a plea for world peace. The closing line says, “a time for peace, I swear it’s not too late.” What a wonderful blessing that would be.

And yet we are reminded the cycle of life continues, “Through winter days our tree would shiver in the wind, Waiting for the warming touch of spring.” The time of peace is not yet with us. The world continues to shiver in the wind waiting for that time of peace.

As has been noted, the verses of Ecclesiastes continue with life giving statements and statements which we would rather not encounter as we travel our road of life. Our road may be one that is well worn and travelled by many. Or as

Robert Frost describes in his poem “The Road Not Taken” it may be one wanting wear and that may make all the difference.

Whether you take the well worn road or the road wanting wear and less travelled,... each of us will not travel alone. We have companions on our journey. We have fellow travellers that encounter similar events, each with their own nuances. Each of us encounters the brightness of summer sunshine. Yet we also encounter our individual thunderstorms. Storms filled with energy and at times so frightening that we do not know what to do. What we do and how we react is up to each one of us.

At those times the road and the wind we face are unwelcome. But there are times to laugh and to dance. Maybe it is a time to sing. It could be a time to enjoy the blossoms of spring and the warmth upon your face.

In all of these instances we do not travel alone. The shadows may be dark and looming. Do not let them overtake you for you have this knowledge with you from the Psalm read this morning,  
“7 Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. 9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, 10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.”

We do not travel our road alone. The Lord’s spirit is with us always. The Lord’s hand is there to guide us, if only we would allow the Lord to do so. He does hold us in the palm of his hand. The last line of the verse from May The Road Rise To Meet You says, “May God hold you in the palm of his hand.” What a wonderful blessing to know that we are held in God’s hand.

Many of us will have heard the Irish blessing in this morning’s duet. There are many blessings that are shared between humans. What do we know of this particular blessing’s background,... unfortunately not much. The author is unknown. We do know that it has been passed down from generation to generation, part of Ireland’s oral history. Some suggest that it was written by St. Patrick. From the “Pastor Appreciation Blog” I share the following:

“When we look at the words of this verse, beginning with “May the road rise up to meet you,” this prays God’s blessing on your journey. May it not be too difficult, without obstacles and challenges to overcome. Then, we see the images from nature: the wind, sun, and the rain. Historically, this points to God’s overall care and provision for us. Yes, the wind can be compared to God’s Spirit, in a word used to describe His arrival and presence, in Scripture. The sun easily

represents warmth and comfort of God's protection. The rain, a necessary part of growth, is prayed to be a soft, gentle rain.

I think about whether it's ok to write about a "blessing" that doesn't include Scripture. Then, I think about the Patriarchs. How important it was that the head of a family would give his "blessing" to others. Maybe it was to family members (especially heirs), or visitors, or even strangers. How the word "blessing" is such a large part of human relationships. How it is the intent behind the words, and not just the words, which carry such power. I think about how we, in seeking to get approval of a plan, a goal, maybe a marriage, seek to gain someone else's "blessing." Think about it. The simple definition of blessing is "approval that allows or helps you to do something; help and approval from God; something that helps you or brings happiness."

<https://pastorappreciationblog.com/2016/02/27/origin-and-notes-on-the-irish-blessing-may-the-road-rise-to-meet-you/>

I ask that you close your eyes and reflect upon your blessings. (Pause, count to 10 then continue) Have you sat under a tree and enjoyed its shade as children played? Think back to the days of family gatherings around a campfire... A time filled with the roasting of hot dogs and marshmallows... A time filled with stories and singing. Or maybe most importantly being able to gather and share with one another. These times may seem distant. The road ahead may have detours and potholes, but rest assured the road will become smoother. We will have the opportunity to make new joyful memories. Memories of colourful autumn leaves falling to the ground. Piles of leaves for children to jump on and into. Crunchy leaves to walk through on a brisk fall morning. The smell of flowers blooming in spring, lilacs in full blossom.

Travel with me through blessings and memories past in the full knowledge that new blessings await. Should you be granted one specific blessing today, what would it be? (Pause) How would that blessing enrich your journey?... Maybe it is a blessing that you want to share with someone, someone that would very much appreciate words of support, encouragement or affirmation.

God is with you as you travel. He asks you to travel with him. Are you ready to travel with him and receive his blessing? As I re-read the passage from Song of Songs consider that it is the Lord our God speaking to you, ...speaking to you to arise and join in him in a journey of blessing on the road with him. I would encourage you to close your eyes and take up his invitation as you listen:

“10 My lover spoke and said to me, “Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me. 11 See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. 12 Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come; the cooing of doves is heard in our land. 13 The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me.”

“May the road rise to meet you  
May the wind be at your back

May the sun shine warm upon your face until we meet again

May God hold you in the palm of his hand.”

Amen.

### Benediction

“I wish you enough sun to keep your attitude bright.  
I wish you enough rain to appreciate the sun more.  
I wish you enough happiness to keep your spirit alive.

I wish you enough pain so that the smallest joys in life appear much bigger.  
I wish you enough gain to satisfy your wanting.  
I wish you enough loss to appreciate all that you possess.  
I wish you enough hellos to get you through the good-byes.”

I Wish You Enough.

Amen.