**Sept 13, 2020 - My Summer Vacation**

**Based on** **Psalm 148 and Isaiah 55:12 – 56:2**

**Prayer:**

Take a few seconds to walk with me down memory lane. Do you recall a time, probably in grade school or junior high, when one of the first assignments you had was to write a few paragraphs about what you did for your summer holidays. Some teachers likely did this to bring us back gently to the art of focusing, others to gauge our writing, grammar, and spelling skills. What you did for your summer holidays, oh those were fun memories. Camping, fishing, swimming, spending time with my girlfriend, just being lazy…..

I took stock of my time away from church this summer and I wanted to tell you a little about it.

One day I was down in Penticton getting the car serviced. Liam and I took a nice walk as the work was carried out. We sat in the shade and I had a coffee and a pastry (Liam had water, and some of my pastry), and as we relaxed, I heard a piano across the street. I looked over and a man was seated at a piano on the sidewalk and he was playing. (Picture 1) And he played very well. He played two songs and a crowd gathered and clapped. He got up to leave and folks shouted “encore.” Bashfully, he sat back down and played another melody. Then he got up, rejoined his friends, and walked away.

Just then a young girl, visiting Penticton with her parents, asked if Liam was friendly and could she pet him. “Of Course,” I said, and she did. And she told me about her dog back home in Calgary.

Liam and I got up to leave and another man sat down at the piano and began to play. He played some chords, but the playing was irregular and not melodic. I didn’t notice anyone standing by, but all the same I thought that was, as our young people would say, pretty cool.

I had the pleasure of some incredible granddaughter time as well . this summer. Predictably, the beach was the big hit. Trinity spent hours on her little floatie and practicing her swimming prowess. (Picture 2)

We did a bit of snorkeling too and were surprised to see the lake teeming with schools of what must be juvenile trout.

Now a 4-year-old and a lake are a recipe for sheer glee and Athena proved that. How is it they don’t feel the cold at all? No hesitation whatsoever, right in they go. One day we were down at the dog park and it was cool. Smart grandpa had Athena in sandals, leggings, and a sweater. Now just put your toes in the water Athena, its’ cold today. What was I thinking? (Picture 3) Soon she was completely drenched, and she even wanted ice cream afterwards.

Trinity was here over our Anniversary. We went out together for dinner that night and had a great time. The following evening Trinity had something special planned as an anniversary gift for Lenore and I. She sat us down at the table and gave us menus. She made them herself and we had choices of appetizer, main course, and dessert. She put on a false moustache and acted like a waiter. (Picture 4) It was hilarious. Then she danced around the kitchen with dinner music. What a ham! What a memory!

Covid dissuaded Lenore and I from a bonafide holiday away but we had some excellent quality time together. We had a splendid sit-down wine tasting experience at La Frenz Estate in Naramata. It was wonderful and relaxing, and we sipped the local products and looked out on the magnificent view. We learned that our “tasting” location was precisely the spot where some 67 years ago a photograph was taken that graced the front of the Canadian $100 bill from 1953 (my birth year) until 1975. (Picture 4)

It doesn’t take long though for the bubble to burst does it. Once back in a routine the diversions evaporate all too quickly. Thick smoke surrounds us in Peachland, and we understand just how incredibly horrific the fires are in California, Oregon and Washington. Prayers hardly seem enough to offer to those that have lost everything or to comfort family and friends who are grieving loved ones.

A defiant president Lukashenko in Belarus will not relinquish control despite a groundswell of support for opposition leader Maria Kolesnikova. A crack down by heavy handed police seems only to be fueling support, primarily by women in the country. How will this story conclude? We know it could be ugly.

The devastating explosion in Beirut Lebanon has left an estimated 300,000 homeless amidst an already hostile state of military conflict. Lebanon is already being crushed by a prolonged financial crisis, and soaring inflation that is making basic commodities unfordable. And we won’t talk about what is taking place politically with our southern neighbours. It is all just too depressing.

Both scriptures that Brenda offered us this morning are praises of joy, joy for a creator who has given us so many blessings. They are meant to be uplifting, nourishing and hopeful. The words are meant to be sung out loud in celebration. In fact, we will be singing part of the Isaiah reading in our closing hymn this morning.

Can you imagine the delight in witnessing mountains and hills breaking into cries of joy? Perhaps it is only in Hollywood that one might witness the trees in the countryside “clapping their hands” in a celebration of God’s gift, our world. That is unfortunate because I confess that such an image to me is something I readily experience. I see creation and all that is good in God’s world celebrating constantly.

The Holy Presence even comes into places where there seems anything but hope. In the midst of chaos in Beirut people are finding a way to continue going on and the homeless are finding ways to cope. First responders continue to serve on the front lines for those suffering from Covid 19. Firefighters from around the globe have joined in the struggle to save property and protect lives. Women in Belarus are refusing to give in or give up. Their steadfast support for change to corruption in government is not wavering despite their own personal peril. It is in these times that the hills break into cries of joy and the trees clap their hands. We can help with such occurrences as we seek justice in a hurting and sometimes tormented world.

Hope for positive change, recovery, reconciliation, and even peace exists for those that believe that through us God works in ways that, while not always obvious or timely, are indeed profound. Those miracles can and do occur.

I was so very fortunate to have witnessed the mountains and hills breaking into cries of joy this summer, as I witnessed people smiling on the street, playing music, and petting my dog. And I felt it as I played with my granddaughters, swam, ate ice cream, gazed out on the incredible creation, and relaxed. And I myself clapped my hands loudly when the grandchildren made me laugh of gave me a huge hug. I do hope you were able to clap your hands a few times this summer as well. It is something we often forget to do. We forget to celebrate, to give thanks, to be constantly amazed at the gift we have of being here and being a part of this, God’s Wondrous World.

And I hope and pray that for the multitude that are not able to celebrate a summer experience as I did, that it will come to them soon. May the hills and mountains break into song in the lives of those that need it most this day.

Thanks for Listening this morning. Amen