

*Remembrance Sunday*

**“And yet ...” – Rev. Jane Swatridge**

**Psalm 119: 89 – 96, 145 – 152**

Many years ago, at Rivercrest Public School in Toronto, I was among a group of 10 students who had shown some musical promise, according to the scores of the school-wide ear-testing. We were given the opportunity to join the string program. I desperately wanted to learn the cello, however I was home sick the day the other students met our string instructor and didn't get to choose an instrument. Brenda Nicholson got to play the cello, and I was given whatever was leftover – the bass. At first, I could barely hold it up but I learned and very soon, I came to appreciate the sound and the versatility of my beautiful big bass.

Our teacher, Mr. Trembath, was fantastic – patient and encouraging and never let it get too easy. But he never gave up on us, or let us give up on ourselves. Whenever we moaned about our slow progress or a particularly painful, cringe-causing performance, we'd complain, “This is too hard, we can't play this!” Trembath would smile like he knew something we didn't, and he'd say, “Yet. You simply can't play it, yet!” and we would try again. When he added, “Yet”, to our self-defeating whine, we knew there was hope; we knew that he believed we could do it even if we didn't believe it ourselves. “Yet” became a very powerful word at string practice.

What are the words that inspire your hope? “I am the Good Shepherd”? Or perhaps, “Unto you a child is given”, or, “Forgive them, for they know not what they do”. Are the words of John 3:16 your go-to verse for hope, as Martin Luther called it, “The Gospel in a verse”. More recently, did the words, “I have a dream”, or “One giant step for mankind”, give you hope for humanity's progress?

Or do you find your hope in, “Thou shalt not steal”, and “Thou shalt not covet”, as the author of Psalm 119 finds his hope in the law. Remember, the Psalmist never knew Jesus, never read our Gospels or anything in the New Testament, or ever heard about the life and death and resurrection of Jesus – all the things that allow us to live in hope. The writer of Psalm 119 found his hope and peace, his delight and strength and salvation, in the laws and commandments of our Lord God. Verse 92, “If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my misery”, and verse 150, “Those who persecute me with evil purpose draw near, YET you are near, O Lord, and all your commandments are true”.

For the early Hebrews, God communicated with them and came closest to them through His Word or Law – those terms were synonymous 3,000 years ago and every Word of God was Law. These weren't merely printed letters on mass-produced pages, millions of copies readily available in every pew and bookstore. These Laws represented for the ancient Hebrews the very Life and Nature and Essence of God, as though they were written by God's own hand. The words were found on sacred scrolls, locked away for protection, guarded and handled with reverence at Sabbath gatherings.

But it's just the dusty old Law, we may think; then Jesus came and taught the New Covenant. Please let's not leap too quickly to the Greek Bible without spending some unhurried time in the Hebrew Bible, the Bible that Jesus studied and quoted, the history and the prophets of Christ's human ancestry, the stories of the nation from which God chose to bring His Son.

How do we find true peace and hope in the Law, the Ten Commandments at the very core of the Law, as the Psalmist declares so passionately? Well, what gives us hope? Why *are* we at peace with Christ? Short answer: because we know we are loved unconditionally, that there's nothing we can do to make God love us any more

or any less, that we're certain our God wants what is best for us, and wants to be close to us, and to be included in our lives by *our choice*, and not just because we're bending to His demand.

We've all read the Ten Commandments, right? It reads like a list of rules, of Don'ts. It doesn't seem to be a very warm and fuzzy basis for hope, and yet the Psalmist says, "I put my hope in your word", or in your law, at verse 147.

Anyone else has a lot of rules in their house? When I was 4 years old, we moved into a new house on the Humber River ravine in the northwest corner of Toronto. There was an 80 foot cliff drop at the back of our house, but we all found other easier ways to get "down the Humber", as we called it whenever we went exploring in the valley and wading through the river. Mom & Dad had to institute some rules about going down to the river, but that was just the beginning. We had rules about watching TV and homework, and who could hang out with, and when, and curfews as I got older, and what I could wear – wasn't thrilled about the NO JEANS outside of the house rule, but eventually I started to understand that the rules were never for the purpose of control or restriction; they were in place for my safety and well-being and to teach me to make good decisions. They didn't always work and I've never been terribly good with rules. I could stray far and fast, but I honestly don't remember the punishments. I remember a lot of talking, no yelling, just a serious conversation during which I came to understand my error and the trouble I was inviting into my life, and worst of all, how I had hurt and disappointed my parents. Oh those were awful, heart-ripping moments, when the two people I love most and who love me most were disappointed in me!

God's Law, the Word as given in the Commandments, are not a list of don'ts and rules → it's a love letter from our Heavenly Parent who wants so VERY MUCH to keep us out of trouble, who wants us to stay well, to stay focused on His goodness and to rely on His abundance rather than get distracted and tempted by lesser gods like money and self-reliance and status. God's Law reveals a God who adores us, ALL of us, or He wouldn't give us rules to maintain mutual respect and collective harmony.

God's Word also confirms His hope for us. Does a good parent set out rules that they know are impossible for the child to follow? We bemoan the state in our society, the theft, the lies told for great personal gain, the abuse, the disregard and neglect for human life. And yet ... God's Law tells us that we MUST be capable of overcoming baser instincts, of securing a better way to live, or He'd never even ask us to try. We fail at His Law, routinely, and yet ... "The Lord exists forever, His word is firmly fixed"; God has already envisioned for us a life without greed and deception and violence; He's been hoping for us to know peace and justice and kindness since before creation began, and His belief in US must become our hope for ourselves, for our world.

"I put my hope in your word", says the Psalmist, without even knowing how very true that would be for post-resurrection Christians like us. The Psalmist didn't know that God would personalize His hope for us, would lift it off the scroll and speak it into our ears & hearts through His Son Jesus, the *Living Word*. How much love & hope does God have for us, that He would expend so much time and energy and emotion and suffering just so we would live in hope with Him? We wonder at our times, at human history over the past century, and yet ... "His faithfulness endures to all generations". Rest in His Word and live in Hope. Amen.