

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY APRIL 14 2024

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Awesome Wonder”

Based on Acts 3:12-19

The resurrection had come and gone. The time for weeping and hiding and living in fear had passed. The disciples finally reached a point of spiritual maturity and commitment to take the helm of this Jesus Movement, determined to carve a place for Christ's message in the religious community, and to set the stage for a lasting church that would inspire the generations to come.

And it was working.

- The church was growing.
- The church was enthusiastic.
- The church was vibrant and visionary.

It brought hope to the people. It inspired believers to stretch their limits.

It blurred the lines between differences, finding instead, common threads that drew communities together in solidarity and support.

Last week I asked the question, “What did that early church have that made them so eager for Christ, for building His church, for sharing His message?”

Today I think we learn part of the answer “Our God is an Awesome God.” When was the last time you thought of your God as ‘awesome’?

This past week, my eyes were glued to the television as I watched the solar eclipse slowly make its way across the sky on the other side of the country, knowing in my mind, that what I observed as a slow path to darkness and then a return to light was in fact, our earth and our moon hurtling through space at thousands of miles per hour.

It is difficult to watch the alignment of stars and planets in such a way and not be ‘awed’ by what our universe can show us. One wonders about the dance and grand symmetry between suns and moons; the great arcs of orbits, the splash of comet tails in the warmth of the sun, the mystery of the dark side of the moon. There is something both clinical and scientific about our universe that moves alongside this sense of an even larger, guiding presence that designed it in the first place: an awesome God.

Our earth has much to show us about its resilience, its creativity, its colour, and its design if we are willing to see

it. I think of the unexpected pleasure coastal cities discovered during COVID, when travel was limited and pollution of the waterways decreased. There was a return of fish, and swans and marshes.

Yet at the same time, in places like Chernobyl where there has been great destruction, and radiation has closed off parts of our planet to people: the animals and plants are adjusting; changing at a genetic level and even thriving in the midst of terrible surroundings. These too, are reflections of an ‘awesome God’ at work. I am reminded of the words to one of our most beloved hymns:

*O Lord my God, When I in
awesome wonder,
Consider all the worlds Thy
Hands have made;
I see the stars, I hear the rolling
thunder,
Thy power throughout the
universe displayed.
Then sings my soul, My Saviour
God, to Thee,
How great Thou art, How great
Thou art.*

~Carl Boberg

This is the kind of God these early Christians spoke of. They were eager for Christ, in part, because they deeply felt this sense of:

- How big God was,
- What God was really capable of,
- What God might have in store for His people.

This was:

- A God who could heal the sick,
- A God who could continue to love, even after being crucified,
- A God who could forgive,
- A God who could offer compassion and understanding,
- A God who celebrated gentleness,
- A God who valued everyone equally,
- A God who gave voice to the voiceless.

This was new news to the people of Peter's Day. Good News indeed. In a time in history where life was menial at best, where inspiration was suppressed, where status quo was expected, where roles were pre-determined, where independent thinking was countered by Roman torture or imprisonment, this 'awesome God' the disciples spoke of

- Valued each person as an important part of God's plan whether poor or rich.
- Encouraged personal opinions and thoughts about God and life,
- Gave time and care to those who had been pushed aside or to the margins.
- Inspired hope and gave permission to dream.
- Believed in second chances,

- Modelled graciousness for those who struggled to stay on a good path.

Today we live in a world where many of these ideas are engrained upon our children from the very beginning. We forget in our comfortable place in the universe, that there are still places in the world where these basic ideas about valuing and caring for people are not guiding principals for living together in harmony.

We have also forgotten, that there was a time in the more recent history, where the church played an important role in teaching, and setting the example of these ideas.

When Peter and John shared the Good News about the 'Awesome God' they served, it was the first time most had even heard of the ideas of equality, grace, or forgiveness. Is it possible in our current times, when much of society would prefer to push religion and the church to the margins, that we have the opportunity to once again to not only be the voice that proclaims our 'Awesome God' but shares also, these ideas of compassion, sharing, sanctuary.

If the world does not want to hear about our "Awesome God" from the pulpit, then perhaps we can teach them of how awesome our God is, by being examples of His 'Awesomeness' as a way of leading people to the pulpit.

It seems a bit contrary, doesn't it.

We used to say, "Serve God, then serve your community." Now it appears to be, "Serve your community, so that they will learn to serve God."

Peter said,

Turn to God...the time will come when the Lord will make everything new. (Acts 3:19)

Indeed, re-building the church today is a 'new' endeavour. But if we believe Peters words to be true, then our God is just as 'Awesome' now, as He was in Peter's Day, and as He has always been.

We just have to share this news in a new way.

We have to be eager and excited to see what He is planning for us...

When was the last time you spoke of our 'Awesome God' with breathless wonder in your voice?

When was the last time you prayed to our 'Awesome God' with hushed holiness in your whispers?

When was the last time you served our 'Awesome God' with delight in your heart?

Is it time?

Amen.