

Pentecost 20 Prayers Plains Baptist Church 190th Anniversary, Sunday October 18 2020

BIRTHDAYS

18TH Judy Burgess
 18TH Pat Martyn
 20TH Bob Bell (91)
 21ST Marion Maynard
 21ST Wendy Lessard (70)

24TH Evelyn Kennedy

ANNIVERSARIES

20TH Dan & Shirley Dale
 20TH Todd & Kelly Ruddock
 21ST Tom & Marion Lammiman

PRAYER CONCERNS

Friends and family of the
 late Marietta Roberts
 Rust & Marfleet Families
 Rev. Brian & Dianne
 Sherry & family
 Mary Joan
 Ellen Brekelmans & de
 Gouw family
 Cathy Barrett Tredenick

Jason Carnegie
 Milt Springer
 The Cannady's
 Hartford family
 Marilyn Cartwright
 Carol Maes
 Sally Paul
 Rae Axford
 Judy Jacklin

Betty Graham
 Marilyn Smith
 Ralf & Pettit families
 Jean Lammiman
 Vince Melvin
 Pete Schellenberger (Rona
 Wilson's brother)

PASTORAL PRAYER *(Note: The Plains people love to sing! I've included a few lyrics from some hymns/praise songs, to remind us of how music ministers to us and through us as we raise our voices and hearts in melody to God.)*

"Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing, tune our hearts to sing thy grace!" ((lyrics R. Robinson) **Receive to your heart, our prayers of gratitude praise and intercession. Even though we do not always live up to our own standards of caring or stewardship, you love us and forgive us. Even when we think poorly of others, often laying down our judgements without all the facts, you do not think poorly of us.... and you know us through and through!**

With humility we acknowledge just how much we rely on your constant presence and trust in your promise to be our strength and shield. "You are my strength when I am weak, you are the treasure that I seek, you are my all in all." (lyric D. Jernigan) **and an oasis of calm in time of storm. Thank you for revealing your unwavering love and firm belief that we can be "channels of your peace,"** (lyrics St. Francis of Assisi) **in our wonderful but wounded, world!**

Loving Parent, hear our prayers for the peoples of the Earth. We pray for all who suffer, all who are imprisoned by poverty, abuse, mental illness and disease. We uphold in our hearts agencies and individuals, governments and nonprofits that are focusing their skills and resources to fight and end Covid 19's grip. We pray for Canadian Baptist Ministries and the outreach they do in South America, Africa and the Middle East to share the gospel not just with words but with deeds that produce life-sustaining results.

We pray for our community. Thank you for the quiet resolve of neighbors, community partners, medical care-givers, front line workers, family members and church family who diligently wear face coverings to protect others. Be with all educators, parents and students who are doing their best to stay safe while learning and teaching. Shield them from harm like a mother hen protecting her chicks. *“He’s got the whole world in his hands!” (spiritual)*

We offer prayers for the Plains Church. 2020 marks the 190th year of continuous ministry of our church. “Through many hardships, toils and fears, we have already come”! *(lyrics J. Newton)* And yet, we are so *“glad to be a part of the Family of God,” (lyrics W&G Gaither)* as we envision each face and recall special times of fellowship and rejoicing that we have experienced together.

We think of the generations of people on whose shoulders we stand; those who raised their families through times of bounty and blight, war and peace, Depression and prosperity, stress and celebration. We praise you for pastors and leaders who preached and taught the gospel, not just in loving words but by their humble example. Thank you for our faith heroes and sheroes who both inspired and continue to inspire as we daily walk the Way of Jesus; *“no turning back, no turning back.” (lyric ‘I Have Decided to Follow Jesus’)*

Separate-But-United, with our sisters and brothers in faith the Plains people joyfully look forward to participating in opportunities with encourages each other and blesses our wider community. Be with u

s as we take part in the Plains Drive-Past Praise Parade to mark our 190th year. *“Oh this little Baptist Church had stood the test of time!” (lyrics Sharon Axford, Plains’ 180th Anniversary Hymn)* May October 18 2020 be a wonderful time of celebration and a happy memory which we will cherish for years to come.

We bring our prayers for those on our prayer list. May they sense a peace that passes understanding upholding them. May they find your strength sufficient for them in their time of need. (Silent Prayers)

Thank you, Lord for saving my soul, thank you Lord for making me whole, thank you Lord for giving to me, thy great salvation so rich and free! (lyrics S & B Sykes)

“Amen... AMEN... AMEN!”

THE EPISTLE I Thessalonians 1: 1-10

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers and sisters, beloved by God, that he has chosen you, because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake.

And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

Sermon: FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

Happy 190th Anniversary, Plains Family! Even though a pandemic messed with our annual worship celebration, we will gathered apart but unified Sunday afternoon for a Drive- by Praise Parade at the church. It will be both fun and moving for me to see you and greet you.

It's strange to think that this event will be the first time since March 15 2020 that the Plains family is together at our church. Given that, it is fitting that Anniversary Sunday would draw us in one place at one time to praise God for all our blessings and for 190 years of ministry! As one of the praise songs we love to sing says: *Our God is an awesome God!* The Spirit of God will flow and flutter, soar and surround our vehicles and us as we give witness to God's enduring faithfulness to all generations, including ours. 2020 so far is going to be unforgettable in many ways. But our 190th Anniversary will help to make 2020 it memorable in a meaningful and joyous way. May the memory of the parade of praising, happy parishioners tug at your heartstrings and bring a smile to your faces as it will for me, whenever I think of it.

Time is a strange thing to measure. I don't know about you, but it seems like a lifetime ago that we were engaged in our regular work, school and church routines. And yet, time since the shut down in March time has flown by! Here we are in mid-October! Fall descended around us in glorious multicolored landscapes! The crops are harvested, the pumpkins are placed for display and Halloween!

Our little church was born almost 40 years prior to Confederation! The new church is now 40 years old! The stained glass windows have been in place 30 years! The Oak tree gracing the front lawn will celebrate her 30th year next year! I've been marking my 30th year as pastor this year! Where did that time go?

I read parts of Jean Griffin's church history that she compiled in 1981, the year the former Plains church was replaced with a beautiful, new brick edifice. What a terrific document Jean left to us! As both a student of history and as Pastor I've turned to that book often over the years. That book has answered a lot of questions over the years and refreshed many precious memories. Jean was meticulous in both her story-telling and record keeping. In the Plains history book and other books that she compiled for families over the years, Jean added interesting facts and stories about the real people behind the names and dates.

As I was reading in the Plains book about the church's founding I was struck by a detail that I knew about but stands out now in vivid relief, due to the current pandemic situation. Though the congregation was formally founded in 1830, for awhile members met in people's homes. The first church building, a clapboard building was constructed sometime between 1835 and 1838. But before that building was erected, in 1832, a deadly *cholera outbreak* ravaged the community. The common belief was that it spread from boats that had docked in Port Stanley. Those stricken ill with cholera in the Union area were housed at the small school house which stood on the property where the Plains church stands today. Dr. Hawkins, a doctor who lived across from the school ministered to the ill and dying. Tragically, both he and his wife died of the disease.

After the outbreak eased, the neighbors burned the schoolhouse as well as Dr. Hawkins' home. The neighbors then avoided travelling past the corner for a period of time because they were so afraid of catching cholera. However, the resilient residents of South Yarmouth did return to that location at the cross roads to build a place for worship. They named it the First Yarmouth Regular Baptist Church. It's nickname, 'The Plains' was a nod to the stand of trees, including giant Oaks which covered the "peaceful plain which stretched four miles south to Lake Erie". (*Plains History*, p. 8) How wonderful that Dayna's oak tree stands as a reminder of that history!

This little church, born during a time of cholera, has lived through many hard and good times in the almost two centuries since. It's modest in number but resilient membership has withstood two Great Wars, the Great Depression, various economic downturns and, two or three painful schisms among her members. Generations of people have raised their families here, been baptized, dedicated and married here. Numerous lives have been celebrated and mourned here, and almost 200 Christmases and Easters have been commemorated with heart-stirring anthems, and simple but moving pageantry. And we cannot forget all the church dinners, bazaars and other community events that has enabled us to minister to the wider community, and have tons of fun doing it! Where did the time go?

As we move forward into our 191st year we are forced by circumstances beyond our control to remain focused on weathering this protracted pandemic. Other challenges and opportunities affecting our church pre-March such as Sunday School and an aging population remain to be addressed with prayerful thought and action. The People of God always find our inspiration and guidance from prayer and from the countless examples and strong testimonies of our spiritual ancestors on whose 'faith shoulders' we all stand.

We Plains people stand on a lot of strong shoulders! We stand on the shoulders of the pioneers who carved homes, neighbourhoods, churches and schools out of a wilderness land. We stand on the shoulders of the indigenous peoples who lived on this land for centuries before European immigrants showed up with their dreams and tragically, with diseases, like cholera. The indigenous peoples respected Creation and the Great Spirit who gave them the land to tend and to share. And we stand on the shoulders of Christians and those of other faiths who live by the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

The Christian's faith family tree alone, is massive and complex, but it is filled with people who loved and served God with courage and hope, and many contributed in changes that transformed lives and shaped society. The Christian's faith family tree begins, of course, with the first followers of Jesus, and the early church which was born after Jesus' glorious resurrection from the dead. Although he was not counted among the first 12 of Jesus' closest disciples, Paul the apostle became one of the church's most important leaders and impactful missionaries.

The scripture we read today is from a letter Paul wrote to a church that he visited while on his second missionary journey. Scholars believe that the letter of I Thessalonians, written to Christians living in Greece in 52 CE is the earliest document in the New Testament. If this is so, then this letter was written to Christians around 20 years after Jesus' resurrection. The fledgling church in Thessalonica did not have the advantage of having four gospels to read. The gospels had not been written yet! They had to trust in their leaders and rely on what they were taught and on the examples that leaders like Paul showed them of what it meant to be followers of Jesus. Paul took his leadership responsibility seriously. So he penned a letter to check in and to encouraging this young congregation to stay true to what he had taught them. Easier said than done, given that the church faced real and daunting challenges.

For one thing, the Thessalonians lived in a major port city that was controlled by Rome. All the people in the Roman Empire were compelled to worship the Emperor. But Caesar was not Lord to the new believers. Jesus was Lord and he and God alone deserved their full devotion. This would have caused a lot of upset and concern in their family circles. The Christians would have gotten a lot of pressure to conform to Rome's rules. Perhaps they even faced jail time or even death if the authorities heard a rumor about their new faith in a crucified and raised King.

Paul wanted to encourage the church in Thessalonica to keep on keeping on in practising their faith, not just for short term blessings but also for the long term spiritual benefits; *aka* eternal life spent with Jesus.

In the beginning of his letter, Paul refers to three spiritual qualities for which the young and vibrant church was to be commended. He writes, "*We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before God your work of faith, and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Faith, love and hope, or faith, hope and love, as Paul will later list them in a letter to the Corinthian church. In a letter to the church in Corinth, Paul would close a chapter about the supreme spiritual gift of love with this summation: "*And now faith...hope... and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*"

In 1 Thessalonians Paul talks about faith, hope and love but he adds adjectives to emphasize these qualities that the Thessalonian church had exercised in large measure which have brought honor and glory to God.

He writes that in his prayers, he tells God, about their *work of* faith, their *labor of* love and their *steadfastness* of hope. By work of faith, Paul is commending the church before God

for putting their faith into practice. They were not just talking the talk, they were walking the talk. St. Francis of Assisi is credited with these words: ‘Preach the gospel. If necessary use words.’ He is implying of course that faith to be real, must be lived authentically in our everyday actions.

Secondly, Paul commends the church for its labor of love. The word for love used by Paul is not the word that means romance or friendship. The word Paul uses here for love means self-giving love.

One commentator on this passage describes this love as *“a costly compassion toward another prompted by no worthiness, or future worthiness, in the one so loved.”*

(source Bryan Findlayson)

I’m reminded of the Rotary Club motto: *Service above self*. When we think of self-giving love, we think of Jesus, and of his laying down his life for his friends. Self-giving love is not cheap or easy. It’s costly and it is laborious work when directed at people we may not find easy to help or care about.

Thirdly, Paul both commends the Thessalonians for steadfastness of hope. The word steadfast means “committed, resolute, unwavering.” Some have translated it to mean ‘patient.’ Paul is talking about a hope that holds on and keeps on hoping even when circumstances, people or our own feelings urge us to throw in the towel and give in to despair.

In the context of this letter, the new Christians had an expectation that Jesus would return to earth soon; and they were excited to meet him face to face and become citizens of God’s new world order. As we study Paul’s letters, its clear that he had hoped that Jesus would return in bodily form any day. But as believers began to age, or get sick and die off, the believers became discouraged. They feared that their deceased sisters and brothers would miss out on meeting Jesus. But St. Paul encouraged them to not lose hope but trust that God knew what God was doing and had everything under control.

“For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live with him.” I Thessalonians 5:9

For hope to be steadfast, to last it must be more than wishful thinking, or pie in the sky optimism. Hope to be hope must be grounded in something real, something secure, in which we are confident. A hymn written by Edward Mote, who was 33 years of age when the Plains church was founded, sings of our source of hope:

*“My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness!
I dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus’ name.”
On Christ, the solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.
All other ground is sinking sand.” (Worship & Rejoice 405)*

Thanks for that hymn, Edward Mote!

In my younger years, and in the times when my elders were active in church the unspoken rule was that Christians didn’t need or expect to be thanked for their Christian service. To be thanked, or centered out, or commended for living the work of faith, labor of love and steadfastness of hope was seen as a sign of pridefulness; a lack of humility.

When I arrived as your Pastor in 1990, plans were underway to celebrate the church’s 160th anniversary with a banquet to be held in April at the New Sarum Diner. The focus would be on volunteerism and the guest speaker was Linda Buchanan, coordinator of volunteers

at the Psychiatric Hospital. The Rev. Malcolm Rust impressed upon me that it was vitally important to recognize and celebrate volunteerism, even in the church! I embraced this new idea, at least new idea to me, and we've been celebrating and giving thanks for our church family team ever since!

So, as I read St. Paul's commendations in this letter, the earliest document written in the New Testament, I realize that St. Paul found it very important to encourage and commend the church of Jesus Christ as together they spread the good news of Jesus' love and God's grace in their practical works of faith, in their labors of self-giving expressions of love and in the patient, steadfastness of hope.

So, thanks to St. Paul, thanking God's for all that you are and all you do *is* scriptural! *(thumbs up gesture)* It's natural and easy for me to give God thanks for you on this special day and every day!

Thank you being Christ's Body in a world that needs faith, hope and love as much now as *ever before*. Thank you for your hard work both in the church and beyond it, in sharing God's compassion, grace and peace in your homes, schools, businesses, community and world!

Thank you for your labours of love, looking after loved ones and neighbors and keeping each other safe during this pandemic, and sharing your resources and prayer support in the ministry of this little church and of the CBOQ, CBM and other ministries.

Thank you for the steadfastness of hope that you display in your loyalty, in your participation in YouTube worship, in your praying and in displaying the quiet but certain assurance that God is with you today, tomorrow and always.

Happy 190th Anniversary, my dear Plains family! I give God thanks for your love your prayers and your partnership with me in the gospel of Jesus Christ! *(virtual hug gesture)* I'm sending you a hug!

May the closing words of Paul's letter to the Thessalonians bless and encourage us as we move forward united in faith, hope and love into another year of ministry:

“May the God of peace sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful. He will do this...The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”
I Thess. 5: 23-24, 28

Amen

