**June 28, 2020 Message prepared by Rev. Tom Watson**

**Message: "We Can Make a Difference!"**

When Peter Czowski had his Morningside Show on CBC Radio, a frequent guest was Paul Hiebert, a chemistry professor at the University of Winnipeg, and also a writer.

He published a delightful collection of tales and poems about a mythical character called Sarah Binks, the "Sweet Songstress of Saskatchewan."

In his forward to Sarah Binks, Paul Hiebert has placed the following sonnet:

When I have turned life's last descriptive page,

And written 'finis' to a somewhat unplanned tale,

With here its moments of poetic rage,

And there long prose of dubious avail,

My friends will come and say, 'He was a sage,

Lo, count the leaves, in truth, 'tis noble, look'

All this accomplished in his single age'"—

And sigh, and reverently close the book.

But from the multitude will come a few,

Sweet sprightly souls who read not to enlarge

Each chapter to heroic tome, nor view

The title page as bright emblazoned targe—

But lovingly, to thumb each page anew,

And chuckle at the doodles on the marge.

The sonnet invites us to consider our lives as a book. A book that includes all our dashes of noble purpose and daring accomplishment. Those accomplishments can, of course, be exaggerated out of all comparison to reality once a person has gone. Have you ever known anyone who didn't improve immensely the split second after they died?

But then, in a satirical way, the sonnet says that, hopefully, there will be those who will pay attention not so much to the pages in bold print, but to the doodles in the margins. And to get a chuckle from what is found scribbled there—from the stuff that often goes unnoticed.

Paul Hiebert appropriately reminds us that there—at the edges—are found the philosophical fragments that inform how we pattern our lives in the rough-and-tumble of things.

So I ask: What are the doodles in the margins that we might like other people to find and think about?

The first thing I suggest we might like them to see scribbled in the margins is: "She/He saw life as a gift—a gift to be used, and to be shared."

There is a story about a father who was disappointed with his son's academic performance at school, so he said to him, "Son, do you know what Justin Trudeau was doing when he was your

age?" The boy replied, "No, Dad, I don’t. But I know that by the time he was your age he was Prime Minister."

Of course, not every one of us should strive to become Prime Minister. But, surely, each of us should strive to do something useful with our lives, so that we add to life around us.

What you do and what I do will not be the same, but each of us can do something to leave this place a little different and a little better because we were here.

The other day, I received an email from a contact in St. Petersburg, Florida. His name is Don Sandin. He wrote, "There are things I still want to and need to do. I'm too young to quit."

Don Sandin is 91 years old. But he says he's...hear it again..."too young to quit." Don Sandin sees life as a gift, and he's going to use it to its fullest, as long as he can.

The second thing I suggest we might like them to read in the margins of our lives would be this: "Regardless of what was happening, he/she was able to keep his/her sense of humour."

One morning, a woman went down into the basement of her home to do the washing. She hadn't been out of bed long so was dressed only in a nightgown. As she sorted the laundry, she thought to herself, "Oh, I guess I might as well put this in too," and she threw her nightie into the wash.

When she bent over the washing machine to add more laundry, a drip from a water pipe fell on the back of her head. The water was cold, so she reached over and put on her son’s football helmet.

So here she is standing by the washing machine with only a football helmet on when the man from the public utilities walked through the basement door to read the water meter. He took one look and said, "Lady, 1 don’t know who you're playing, but I sure hope your team wins!"

Now, in that situation, the only thing that will help us is a sense of humour.

Hold that image of being caught with nothing on but a helmet in your mind for a moment and use it as a metaphor. In that metaphorical sense, we've all been in some situation where we felt that way. It happens because life is serious business, and sometimes we just run smack up against it. Not much to shield us but an old football helmet.

One of the best tools in our kit in those times is a sense of humour. Life should never be taken so seriously that there isn’t room for a laugh. A good laugh will keep you going when, sometimes, nothing else will.

Thirdly, I suggest we would like them to note is, "No matter what, she/he never lost hope."

We may be a tremendous athlete—be able to throw a baseball at 104 mph, golf at 20 below par on a regular basis, do the women's 100 yard dash in 10 seconds, kick a field goal from 60 yards—but our athletic prowess won't help us a whit when we're up against it.

We may be so famous that we're known by everybody in the world, but fame won’t help us a whit when we're up against it. We may have amassed gazillions of dollars, but no amount of money will help us a whit when we're up against it.

I know from personal experience that, when we're up against it, there is only one thing that will help...and that's hope. Hope is that part of the human spirit that won't give up. Hope is what keeps us going in spite of.

What's hope? It's the farmer out in the field. Working up the land. It hasn't rained in three weeks, so really all he's doing is rearranging the dust. But he keeps going. That's hope.

It's the doctor or nurse working long hours in these Covid-19 times. Just a few more days and maybe we'll turn the tide on the number of deaths from this virus. That's hope.

Hope is the little five year-old girl who puts on a hat, and her mom's high healed shoes, slings a purse over her arm, and goes off down the street.

"How old are you, little girl?"

"I'm 21."

That's hope.

One last thing I suggest we might like them to read from the doodles in the margins of our lives: "He/she saw the world as a wonderful, beautiful place."

My favourite song is *What A Wonderful World*. And I believe it is.

In spite of all the hatred, and all the prejudice, and all the war, and all the sham, the dashed hopes and broken dreams, it really is a wonderful world.

Every once in a while we get so down on things. No wonder, I suppose...because we're inundated with bad news. And even though we're fairly inured to bad news, some of what happens still shocks us enough that we can do nothing else but sit back and say, "Ain't it awful!"

But look beyond that, folks. Don’t let it get you down. See the good stuff that happens. The beauty, the wonder, the joy—those things far outweigh the bad.

The gospel writer John wrote that Jesus said that he came that everybody might have life, and have it abundantly.

But it all begins, I think, with seeing life itself as a gift—a gift to be used faithfully and hopefully...and even though life can be a very serious business, to go through it with a sense of humour. And if we do that, we will make a difference in this beautiful, wonderful world.