

I would like to welcome you, the residents of Caressant Care to this morning's worship devotional. It has been over a month now that the members of the Whitewater Ministerial have been unable to gather with you in person for our regular Thursday morning service, but this morning I come to you in this time of great mourning over the deadliest mass shootings in Canadian history. So we gather in this way to hear and feel the calming peace and steadfast love of our Lord Jesus Christ. For those who may not follow the news this past weekend a deadly rampage in Nova Scotia in the area surrounding the little village of Portapique, 25 people lost there lives So I now invite you to enter into this mornings devotions in caring prayer. Let us pray.

For the people of Portapique,
neighbours and community,
grieving today,
I pray.

For the victims of the shooting,
though I don't know name or number,
I pray.

For their pain and their loss,
for their shock and confusion,
for all that has happened because of
this violence,
O God, I pray for your grace,
your compassion,
your strong presence,
your overwhelming love,
God of all creation.

In Jesus' name...Amen

A minister friend of mine has a sister Rachel who lives in the little town of Portapique NS where the shootings occurred this past weekend and she shared this letter entitled her letter *The Epitome of Home, the Epicentre of Despair*. I now share it with you.

What I realized today is that maybe it's not just me. Maybe for all of us the village of Portapique is the epitome (or essence) of home.

A few days ago, if I had mentioned Portapique (portapick), it wouldn't have registered much. Some of my fellow Nova Scotians would have recognized it if I dropped a few clues. I often called it "the little village about halfway between Great Village and Bass River" or "the tiny place about 20 minutes outside of Truro along the shore," or "just a half hour before Five Islands."

To me, Portapique was the epitome of home. After frequent moves that were the mainstay of a country preacher's life back then, my parents settled there to retire. They bought their first home, a little green wooden house with a quonset hut sitting prettily on some grassy acres bordered by blueberry fields and Highway 2.

Portapique is a little place with just a scattering of homes and an old church, where resilient people have lived quiet, beautiful, meaningful lives for hundreds--in fact, thousands--of years. Long before the town came to be, the Mi'kmaq people thrived in this place. Later Acadians farmed the land, and dykes remain to this day. Ornate, sprawling country homes still dot the countryside showing evidence of a different, more prosperous era.

Dig deep for a moment and muster all of the nostalgia you can. Bundle it up tightly inside until your heart feels like bursting: that is Portapique to me. It is the place of my children learning to skate on a frozen pond, boisterous cousins playing hide and seek til dark, picking blueberries on buzzing August afternoons, late summer family reunions and bonfires in the dusk, after-supper strolls on abandoned roads down to the bay, big starry night skies to take in from blankets spread on the thick summer grass, foggy mornings and the rooster crowing, messy games on the mudflats, meals made from bountiful summer gardens and lively debates at the big kitchen table, the warm woodstove crackling. Home.

Portapique is a place where everyone knew everybody but let them be just who they are. There aren't a lot of rules about "this and that." But it is also a place where people looked in on you when things weren't going well, where you knew the lady who delivered your mail, and you bought your fruits and vegetables from your neighbours. Where your teacher lived in a house down the road. Where you purchased Halloween candy even if you knew you would only get two or three kids, and you knew the kids who came to your door by name.

Now everyone knows about Portapique, and today many also likely learned about our home province, Nova Scotia, for the first time, too. The place of Canada's largest mass shooting, the

headlines shout. Unthinkable loss. Lives cut short. Safety and security stolen. A community shattered. Hearts broken. During the dark days of the pandemic, Portapique has become the epicentre of our despair.

My stake in Portapique is minuscule compared to those who are grieving their loved ones today. I can't even imagine the pain these families are feeling. I'm not trying to compare. I pray these folks will find comfort and support, but I know their loss will stay with them for a lifetime--and the ripple effects of the trauma may linger for generations.

But what I realized today is that maybe it's not just me. Maybe for all of us Portapique is the epitome of home. Portapique is the kind of place we all cherish and take pride in; it's who we are as a people: landscape, sea, sky, communities strung out along highways bound together by our shared love of this place and each other.

So it's no wonder that the assault that this idyllic village has suffered feels personal and tragic on a provincial scale. Ruthless violence came barreling down one of our quiet country roads with a vengeance and ravaged our sense of security, safety and community, leaving our broken hearts in its wake.

Nova Scotians for generations have been a resilient people, persevering through the hard times by building strong

communities, nurturing loving relationships, sharing music and song, creating art and beauty, and telling stories so that hard-earned lessons aren't forgotten but carried forward as a legacy for future generations. May the coming days show the world Nova Scotia's truest, strongest heart, the place we call the epitome of home, where our epicentre is hope.

Let Us Pray

Risen Christ, eternal Savior,
In your boundless love,
You appear to us in our fear and love us non conditionally
and we Thank you for loving us as we are.

We pray for all who are grieving, and especially think of those who lost loves through the tragic events in Nova Scotia and those around the world who have suffered under this pandemic.

We pray for all those of with us this morning
For it is your presence, Loving Christ,
that removes all our fear and eases all of our anxieties :
come, and grant us your presence & peace.

Come to us whenever we are afraid
Come to us now as we pray in silence
For those we care for and are worried about...
Come to us with words of peace as we persevere through this time when
our loved ones are not able to visit with us.
And living Lord Christ, grant to all of us,
renewed faith, great courage, and your boundless hope in the words that
you have taught us to pray. Amen

Song Precious Memories

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MMyyBIHq5Q>