

HOME FROM EUROPE!

I am writing these words as we sail down the Danube having just left Vienna and now heading to Budapest. This is the longest holiday my wife and I have ever taken; we have just eclipsed two weeks.

It has been a most interesting and yet trying journey. As most of you know, my dear wife took a fall in Amsterdam the first day, requiring some professional medical help which was interesting, since we did not speak Dutch and we knew no doctors. We are thankful that the Lord guided us to the right places and has used time to help heal the wounds. And so we journeyed on!

As we went through the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam and later took the World War II tour of Nuremberg, Germany, we were startled that an entire nation could have been led to commit genocide in such a cold, calculated manner. I was reading "Anatomy of Malice" (The Enigma of the Nazi War Criminals) by Joel E. Dimsdale while on our trip and was chilled by these words written by a German policeman who was shooting Jews in October, 1941. He said, "During the first try, my hand trembled a bit as I shot, but one gets used to it. By the tenth try, I aimed calmly and shot surely at the many women, children and infants." I could not help but make a parallel to the situation of the widespread and accepted crime of taking the life of the unborn, even in America, "the land of the free and the home of the brave." So little has been said about this atrocity in our present election cycle, that it gives me the thought of horror: "Has America gotten used to it?" The journey through this era of history has helped me now pray more fervently for our country!

On a much more positive note as we journeyed down the Rhine, then Main and finally the beautiful Danube River, we were astounded at the majesty of the mountains that came to the river's edge and high atop many of these towering hills were castles that we had only seen in photos. As we toured town after town we walked through edifices built over 1,000 years ago. The new things were built in the eighteenth century! With no exaggeration, we walked through areas that looked like fairy tales. It was a time of kings, queens, knights and ladies. As we sailed down the Danube, we even saw the castle where Richard the Lionhearted had been imprisoned after one of the crusades. It was hard to believe, but we were surrounded by a world that was fully functioning before America was a nation!

We have never been in an area of the world where we have seen more gigantic and beautiful cathedrals! Knowing the limited technology and modern helps that we use to construct our buildings, it was breath-taking to behold such works of art towering to the skies, armed only with imagination, hard work and a willingness to sacrifice everything to build these churches. I have to say, we have never seen so

many glorious buildings and yet so little spirituality. As we looked around, I kept think of the passage of Scripture that says, "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.." (II Timothy 3:5a). We saw the need more than ever of missions in the world from which many in our country through ancestry have migrated.

The food was amazing. The ship itself was an experience all its own. We had all the modern accruements one could desire and a peaceful atmosphere to sleep. It also afforded us an opportunity to be a witness to fellow passengers. You might say we had a captive audience. There is so much more I could say, but we are soon to disembark in our last day in Budapest and we must go for now. The main reason we wanted to use the venue of the Pastor's Word to write you this note was to tell you that Barbara and I thought about you every day with thankfulness for the gift of this trip. Every day we thought about the thirty-five years we have spent together as pastor and people. From the bottom of our hearts, we thank you! This was a trip we would have never taken had you (through the Lord) not made it possible. A great highlight for me personally was to be able to spend time with my precious wife, away from most all interruptions. Please know that we have missed you and long to see and be with you again.

We love you! And it's true, "There's no place like home!"

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in black ink and features a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right from the end of the name.