

A Place to Go in Trouble

March 15, 2020

Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

Pastor Dr. Eric G. Peterson

This is a very challenging time. Just a few weeks ago it seemed like our lives and the economy of our country were soaring along. People were hopeful, planning vacations and dreaming dreams of the future. The news of the Coronavirus in China was not good but truthfully, few people expected the effects of the virus to be so disruptive to our lives and for it to happen so quickly. Uncertainty creates fear and there is a lot of uncertainty surrounding this virus. In my lifetime, I have never seen schools close, sporting events canceled, travel limited, or fear circulate as it is right now. We have a right to be concerned because many people have died, and countless thousands are ill, and this could be just the beginning.

St. Paul in the eighth chapter of Romans asks a good question. ***"What do we say to these things"*** (Romans 8: 31). When we are in conversation with people how do we talk about what is happening? Do we respond to anxiety with anxiety, like an electrical transmitter and increase the anxiety? Or is there a way to respond with faith? Jesus said, ***"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven"*** (Matthew 5:14-16).

This is a mission moment. People are trying to understand what is happening and they are looking for hope. The question is "What do we say? Rev. Mark Schroeder, the Facilitator for Mission Engagement in the Southeaster District, wrote this to the congregations in the Southeastern District and addressed he addressed what we should say. He began by asking, "Is the Lord the cause of this?" A good

question? And he went on to say, “In all honesty, he could be. It would be just like Him to send this plague to the world to punish it for sin...you and I included. Some folks are claiming just that...but this is not the case” There are some things we should not say because we are not certain. St. Paul too asked ***“What do we say to the suffering?”*** And he shared with us what is certain. ***“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all...how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things”*** (Romans 8:31-32)? The first response of faith is to share what is certain and that is God love for us. He not only loves us, but he is for us and not against us. The answer to fear is love and God’s perfect love for us in Jesus Christ casts out fear perfectly.

The second response of faith is to focus on the cross. There is an expression that we become what we see. If we focus on our problems our problems increase, but if we focus on our strengths, our strengths increase. Therefore the author of Hebrews encourages us to ***“fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith”*** (Hebrews 12:2) The more we look to the cross and dwell on God’s love for us, the stronger our faith will be and our hope for the future. At Our Savior’s Way we have been praying for the mission of the church. We have been praying that God would pour His Holy Spirit upon all people that they might know Jesus’ love and find salvation in his name. People will be watching how we live and respond to this crisis and they will be listening to what we have to say. The greatest gift we can offer people right now is for us to live with confidence in God’s grace, to share his love to and put fear aside.

St. Paul was no stranger to suffering and hardship and through it all, he learned the secret of how to face them. In Philippians chapter four he wrote, ***“I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me***

strength” (Philippians 4:11-13). The third response of faith is to truly believe God’s word when he tells us he cares and to hold onto to his Word and promises with all our heart, with all our mind and with all our strength.

I would like to share with you a personal story. When I was 32 years old, I hurt my back and I was hospitalized. I was in traction for almost a month. My life was totally out of control. I was a mess inside, worried about everything. And in my devotions in the hospital I came across Psalm 46. ***“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its water roar and foam, and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her; she will not fall; God will help her at the break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdom fall; he lies his voice, the earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Come and see the works of the Lord, the desolations he has brought on the earth; He make wars to cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear. He burns the shields with fire. ‘Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth.’ The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”***

Mountains are the most immovable objects in nature. When the mountains start to shake, the whole world starts to fall apart. This was exactly how I felt. I felt my life was falling apart. I had no control over anything and even worst I couldn’t do a thing about it. Maybe you feel this way now. We can’t control what is happening around us and we can’t fix it. The sea is the symbol of chaos. When the events in our lives become chaotic and life seems utterly out of control, the psalmist assures us that even then God is there for us. He is a present help in trouble. At some point, while lying in bed, I realized that I had to stop trying to be God. I had to trust that God would take care of my family, take care of the church, and take care of me.

When I read the words, “***Be still, and know that I am God***” I realized God was talking to me. I was lying there in traction and as still as anyone could get. I needed to put my trust in God and not in myself. When I turned my focus away from myself and put my focus on God, suddenly my anxiety went away. I was able to relax and let God heal me through his grace. Dear friends, God loves you more than you know or can ever understand. Put your trust in him for he is a present help in trouble. He is our God.

This is a mission moment. And even though the Psalm said we should be still, there are some very practical things we can do.

1. We can pray for those who are ill, for those who are grieving the death of loved ones, for those who have lost incomes because of the loss of work, for the healthcare workers and first responders and for the leaders of the nations and we can pray for the church and God’s mission.
2. We can take proper precautions to protect our health and the health of others.
3. We can keep in contact with our neighbors and those who are most vulnerable to this virus and offer them your help and support.
4. We can continue to financially support God’s mission with our offerings.
5. We can be in God’s Word to strengthen our faith and God’s Spirit within us.
6. And finally, we can give God thanks in all things. We can look at the blessings God has given to us and protect our hearts, so we do not lose our joy.

Dear friends, God loves you more than you know or can ever understand. Put your trust in him for he is a present help in trouble. He is our God. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen.