

# God With Us

## October 18, 2020

### Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church Rev. Dr. Eric G. Peterson

For the last five weeks, we have been talking about relationships and how important they are for us to accomplish God's mission to make disciples of all nations. Relationships are powerful. They mold and shape our lives. The most important relationship of all is our relationship with Jesus Christ. Every day our Lord is molding and shaping our lives by His Word. As the psalmist wrote, ***"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."*** This promise is true whether we are lying down in green pastures or traveling through the valley of the shadow of death. Because of our relationship with our Lord, we will fear no evil. We have an incredible God who has given us incredible hope for the future. The Lord is with us, unfortunately, our troubles and trials can steal our joy and our confidence.

This COVID-19 pandemic has turned our lives upside down. Jobs have been lost, trips canceled, summer camps closed, schools went online, parents have been stressed to the max, children socially isolated, loved ones cut off from family and friends, and in some cases, people have lost their lives. The list goes on and on. And if the COVID-19 pandemic were not enough to cope with, at OSWLC we have had all kinds of changes in our staff, in the use of our building, and in the way we worship. Few things have been normal. If you are feeling a little out of sorts lately, so have I. I don't want to do this anymore! Maybe you feel that way too?

So where do we find comfort? Where is the hope? The words in today's Gospel really spoke to me. These words of Jesus are words of consolation to his disciples and to us. As Jesus and the disciples were celebrating the Passover together, Jesus announced he was leaving them. He told them He would be taken prisoner, would suffer, die, then three days later He would rise again and go to His Father in heaven. Talk about chaos. But Jesus assured the disciples everything was for their good. They needed to believe in Him.

This morning think about these words, *“would be for their good.”* Losing a loved one never feels good. It hurts no matter how much faith you have. Grief is the price we pay for loving someone. St. Paul tells us that God always works His blessings in our lives. He always works for good even in difficult times, whether in laying down in green pastures or walking into the valley of the shadow of death. Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Jesus made us a promise. He said, ***“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid”*** (John 14:27). ***“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart I have overcome the world.”***(John 16:33) With a word Jesus calmed the storm, he healed the sick, he helped the lame to walk and the blind to see. Jesus even raised the dead. He is our Lord, and He is our God. On the cross Jesus conquered sin and, in His resurrection, He put an end to death. Nothing can separate us from the blessing He has prepared for us.

God has a plan to work for good in our lives. The prophet Jeremiah wrote, ***“For I know the plans I have for you,”*** declares the Lord, ***“plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”***(Jer. 29:11)

At Our Savior’s Way, we have a GriefShare ministry that is really amazing. Over three hundred people have participated in our GriefShare program, some more than once. This morning I want to thank Beth Anton who has been the leader of this ministry and the many volunteers who have made this ministry so successful. It has been a joy to be involved in GriefShare and to see how God has used this ministry to change people’s lives. In our GriefShare sessions, people often say, *“I wish things were the same as they were.”* People want to go back to the way things were and get rid of their pain. As a congregation, we might say the same thing to ourselves, *“I wish things were the way they were before.”* The truth is we can’t go back to the way things were before, but we can go forward to a new future, which God has prepared for us. In the midst of change, it is natural for us to be anxious and afraid. Change

is hard and it is uncomfortable. But Jesus assured the disciples, ***“If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.”*** You and I should be glad in the midst of change not because change is easy but because God is with us and He is working for good. The new can't come unless the old is gone.

Grief is like being on a journey. It is a little like getting on a train that you don't want to get on, but you have no choice. The ticket has been purchased for you and you have to get on. And when you get on the train, you do not know where it is going, and you do not know how it will get there. In our area, we are fortunate to have the metro. When traffic is really heavy, it is nice to take the train and let someone else do the driving. The train ride is relaxing because we know there is an engineer who is driving the train and will get us to our destination. In a similar way, Jesus encourages us to put our trust in Him and let Him guide us to where we need to be.

In our welcome on Sunday mornings we say, *“Welcome, to Our Savior's Way, if you are visiting us for the first time this morning, we are glad that you are here. We believe that God always leads us to where we need to be.”* If we believe that God works in our lives in such a personal way as to lead us to where we need to be; how much more God will guide our congregation, guide our community, and guide our country. God has prepared a future for us and He invites us to put our faith in Him to receive it. How do we know things will be okay or we will get through this? We know because Jesus sent us a helper, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is described as *“the Counselor.”* A counselor is a person who comforts and guides. Jesus does not leave us like orphans. An orphan is someone who is without a family and forced to make it on their own. In contrast to being like orphans, Jesus promised the disciples they would thrive. He said, ***“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to***

***the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*** (John 14:12-14)

How blessed we are...God is with us! Through Holy Baptism, God has placed His Spirit in us and filled us with His presence and His power to carry on the ministry Jesus gave to us. St. Paul praised God for the Christians in Ephesus because they were blessed from heaven with every spiritual blessing in Christ. This is true for everyone who believes in Christ and it is true for our congregation as well. We have every gift that we need from God to do the things God has called us to do. With Christ in us, we always have enough to face the challenges of life and to accomplish the purposes of God. This is God's promise to us.

The peace Jesus gives us, is a peace not based upon our circumstances, nor upon ourselves or what we do or what we have. The peace God gives us is based on God's grace alone. The cross of Christ assures us that God loves us, and His resurrection assures us the victory over the powers of this world has been won. When you are in the midst of a battle, it is not the time to withdraw or pull back. It is time to be fully engaged. In GriefShare we see lives change every week when people hear the Gospel and share their stories and come into a relationship with each other. The healing comes from not avoiding the pain, but by leaning on Jesus and going through the pain together. We need to keep going and we need to stay together and find ways to reach out with the hope of Christ and the comfort of His love. We need to do this not just for ourselves, but for our community and for all those who have no hope. Don't let Satan isolate you and steal your joy or diminish your faith. Hold onto Christ and hold onto each other and share God's love.