

March 22, 2020

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Although it has only been one week since we have been together, it seems like my world is on the one hand spinning out of control and on the other hand come to an abrupt stand still. Loose ends are surfacing and decisions are being made as we begin to travel in these uncharted waters. It takes all of us to find our way, so please feel free to be in touch if you have some concerns or insight on how we continue to “be church” during this international health crisis.

Thank you to all who helped out with the distribution of food for the Food Pantry this week. It was great to see the smiling faces of our volunteers on our Facebook page. It was also good to see that those who are at most risk with regard to the corona virus took care of themselves and stayed home.

This week, I have called a few of you each day to check in on you and I will continue to do so throughout this time we are not able to be together. As a way to care for one another, I urge you to call one another or send each other a note or message to tell them you are thinking of them.

Although you may from time to time see Jo Anne’s car or my car is in the parking lot; for our well being, I ask you not to stop in to chat. But, I do urge you instead to give me a call or send me a text or email.

This week you have received a copy of the bulletin that would have been used on Sunday, March 22. Also below is a Facebook post, the text for this Sunday and my written reflections on the text. My apologies for any grammatical errors you may encounter in my message. I write my sermons to be spoken and so you will encounter sentence fragments and run-ons and other

unconventional means of expressing my thoughts. I plan to continue to send you a message each week based on the assigned text.

If you have anything that needs to go in our newsletter, email it to Becky Heffner. Based on what she receives, we will decide whether or not we will publish a newsletter this month.

Stay safe – take care of yourself and take care of one another.

And may you find peace in God’s mercy, love and grace throughout these trying times.

Your sister in Christ
Pastor Denise

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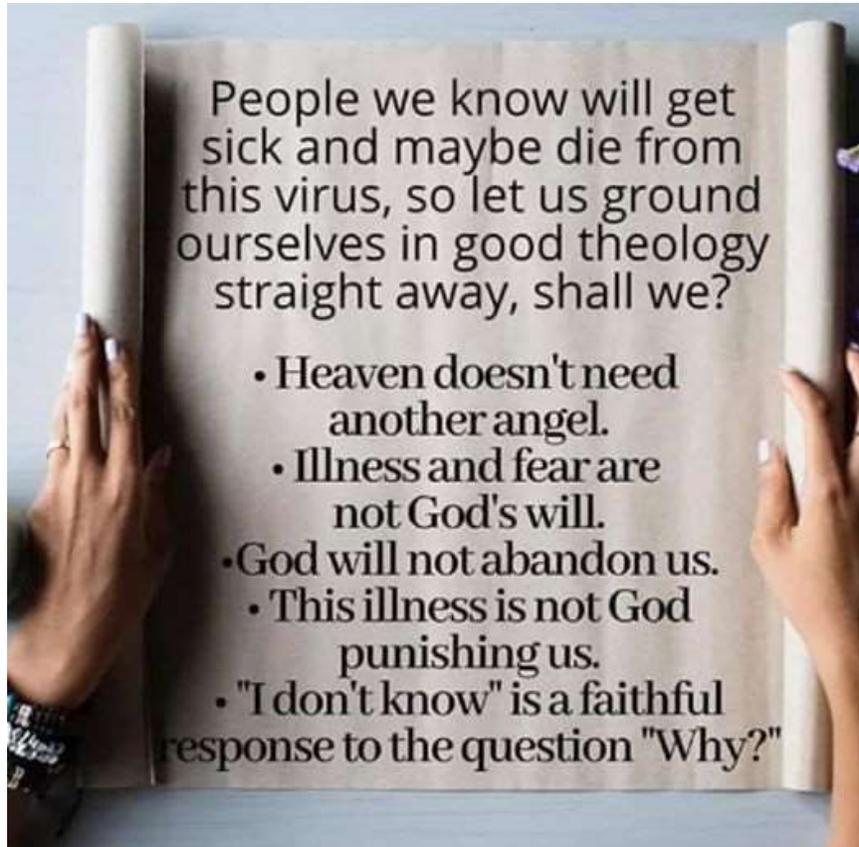
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People we know will get sick and maybe die from this virus, so let us ground ourselves in good theology straight away, shall we?

- Heaven doesn't need another angel.
- Illness and fear are not God's will.
- God will not abandon us.
- This illness is not God punishing us.
- "I don't know" is a faithful response to the question "Why?"

Mark 12:28-44 The Message (MSG)
The Most Important Commandment

²⁸ One of the religion scholars came up. Hearing the lively exchanges of question and answer and seeing how sharp Jesus was in his answers, he put in his question: “Which is most important of all the commandments?”

²⁹⁻³¹ Jesus said, “The first in importance is, ‘Listen, Israel: The Lord your God is one; so love the Lord God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy.’ And here is the second: ‘Love others as well as you love yourself.’ There is no other commandment that ranks with these.”

³²⁻³³ The religion scholar said, “A wonderful answer, Teacher! So lucid and accurate—that God is one and there is no other. And loving him with all passion and intelligence and energy, and loving others as well as you love yourself. Why, that’s better than all offerings and sacrifices put together!”

³⁴ When Jesus realized how insightful he was, he said, “You’re almost there, right on the border of God’s kingdom.”
After that, no one else dared ask a question.

³⁵⁻³⁷ While he was teaching in the Temple, Jesus asked, “How is it that the religion scholars say that the Messiah is David’s ‘son,’ when we all know that David, inspired by the Holy Spirit, said, God said to my Master,
“Sit here at my right hand
until I put your enemies under your feet.”

“David here designates the Messiah ‘my Master’—so how can the Messiah also be his ‘son’?”

The large crowd was delighted with what they heard.

³⁸⁻⁴⁰ He continued teaching. “Watch out for the religion scholars. They love to walk around in academic gowns, preening in the radiance of public flattery, basking in prominent positions, sitting at the head table at every church function. And all the time they are exploiting the weak and helpless. The longer their prayers, the worse they get. But they’ll pay for it in the end.”

⁴¹⁻⁴⁴ Sitting across from the offering box, he was observing how the crowd tossed money in for the collection. Many of the rich were making large contributions. One poor widow came up and put in two small coins—a measly two cents. Jesus called his disciples over and said, “The truth is that this poor widow gave more to the collection than all the others put together. All the others gave what they’ll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn’t afford—she gave her all.”

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. AMEN

Living in and living through a time of crisis. Many of us may have experienced hard times in our lives – maybe there were health struggles, financial woes, dysfunctional relationships, family challenges, loss, grief or just the misfortune of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. But, this international health crisis that we are facing is like no other.

For this challenge is not something we can escape or ignore, this challenge has put a new twist on everything we do from feeding ourselves and our families, caring for our loved ones, paying our bills, taking care of our health - to figuring out how to be in the same place with our loved ones for an extended period of time.

Our plans have been put on hold and we are being forced to make decisions for the reality that we are living in right this moment - knowing that those plans may have to change with the next news report that we receive.

Times of uncertainty – like the times when the disciples watched what seemed to be the self-destruction of Jesus right before their eyes - as he spoke truth to power. The disciples lived in hope that this path that they are on would somehow not lead to the outcome that Jesus had told them about three times. That is, that he would be taunted, ridiculed, accused, found guilty and killed.

There were glimmers of hope, like the triumphant welcome to Jerusalem, but they were few and far between as the tension mounts between Jesus and the religious elite - as Jesus continued to expose the corruption and the greed that has infested temple life.

Those in power were threatened and worried that if Jesus is believed and supported by the crowds - they who have benefitted for so long from the structures that sure up the wealthy and

powerful on the backs of the lowly and the poor – could be at risk of losing their livelihood and the life style that they have become accustomed to.

But in the midst of this tension, a scribe (one of them who is a member of one of the adversarial groups) approached Jesus and asks him a question – not because he wants to trip him up – but after hearing Jesus responses to all of their “trick” questions, this man really wanted to hear what Jesus has to say.

As the man asks Jesus – “Which is most important of all the commandments?”

Jesus answers, “The first in importance is, ‘Listen, Israel: The Lord your God is one; so love the Lord God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy.’ And here is the second: ‘Love others as well as you love yourself.’ There is no other commandment that ranks with these.”

And then the religious scholar responded to Jesus’ answer with these words, “A wonderful answer, Teacher! So lucid and accurate—that God is one and there is no other. And loving him with all passion and intelligence and energy, and loving others as well as you love yourself. Why, that’s better than all offerings and sacrifices put together!”

Love God – with your whole being – with all you heart – with all your mind and with all that is your very being.

And live out your love of God by loving your neighbor as well as you love yourself.

And it is in that act of loving your neighbor as well as you love yourself – that you proclaim to the world your love of God and God’s unconditional love for them.

A simple command that we are to obey always – love God – and demonstrate your love for God by loving your neighbor as you love yourself.

As we watch our society be brought down to its knee with this corona virus pandemic, there are stressful decisions being made and dire consequences that we are all experiencing. As we have this week and will continue in the next few weeks sacrifices and endure personal hardships to take care of and love ourselves and take care of and love of our neighbors.

And although we have never been challenged in this way ever before, this physically distancing ourselves from one another is the way - right now - that we obediently respond to Jesus' command to love God with all that we are and all that we have by doing what it takes - to take care of ourselves and others.

I pray for your safety and your health in this time when the present (gift) that we give to one another is “not” being in their presence.

And be assured, that God loves you forever and for always - and is present with you and will never abandon you.

May God's peace that is beyond all of our understanding be with you now and always.

In the name of the Father and the Son and God's Holy Spirit (+).

AMEN