

March 29, 2020

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we continue in our life together as members of Good Shepherd Lutheran in our separate places, I send greetings from many of your brothers and sisters in Christ that I have chatted with on the phone this week. It is heart warming to hear that indeed many of you are reaching out over the phone, or by text or by email to check up on one another. If there is something you are in need of, give me a call as there are members who have offered to help out as needed.

There are many among us who do not have email and therefore they will not get this message. If you know someone who does not have email, please give them a call and share the information in this message with them. We are working on designating some email "buddies" who would be willing to print out a copy of this email and deliver it (without making physical contact) or mail it to them. If this is something you would be willing to do for a neighbor, let me know. (my contact info below)

Easter Candy – is being stored in the freezer until further notice. It will NOT be distributed as previously planned.

Gary and Diane O'Brien welcomed a new little grandson Charles Michael Henzie, son of Lauren and Sean Henzie into their world on March 27th. Charles Michael is in the NCIU in critical condition and is in need of all of our prayers. Please lift up in prayer Charles Michael and his family.

Also, please pray for Jessica Morrill, Barbara Greth's daughter, who is recovering from a mild case of the Corona virus.

One of the things that was shared with me this week was that some of you found the TV broadcast *Song and Scripture* very comforting and inspiring. For those with Comcast cable, it is on Channel 19. For those with a dish, it is on Channel 60. It runs several times a day. Also, for those with cable Trinity's worship service is on channel 190 at 7:00 pm on Sunday nights.

If you are able, your continued financial support of the church would be helpful. You can either mail in a check to the church (address below) or go to our website goodshepherdclc.org and click on Give to GSELC.

If you have anything that needs to go into our newsletter, email it to Becky Heffner. Based on what she receives, we will decide whether or not we will publish a separate newsletter this month or just include the information in my weekly message.

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

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

Your sister in Christ
Pastor Denise

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Goodshepherdelc.org

A perspective from the days of the plague:
Martin Luther wrote these words over 500 years ago:

"I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me however I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely as stated above. See this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God."

Luther's Works Volume 43 pg. 132 the letter "Whether one may flee from a Deadly Plague"
written to Rev. Dr. John Hess

Mark 13:1-8, 24-37

1 As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!"

2 Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

3 When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, 4 "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?"

5 Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. 6 Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. 7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. 8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

24 "But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, 25 and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

26 Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. 27 Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. 28 "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. 29 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.

30 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. 32 "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

33 Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. 34 It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.

35 Therefore, keep awake — for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, 36 or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. 37 And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

Sermon

Mark 13:1-8, 24-37

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

My prayer for you each day as we are loving and caring for one another from afar is that you are well in mind, body and spirit and that you are finding your way through these times of uncertainty. I pray that you find comfort and strength in Jesus' words that He is with us always and that nothing can separate us from the love, the mercy and the grace of God. AMEN

My sister Karen and my brother-in-law Jack always have the family's Easter dinner and egg hunt. It's a huge gathering of both our family and Jack's family and now with a span of four generations there are always over 40 people that are there. Yes, my sister is a "saint"

The annual Easter dinner and egg hunt was one of the events that I really missed when I lived in New England, because no pastor gets to take vacation on Easter Sunday and I lived 7 hours away.

A few days ago, it dawned on me that this year – not only can't my mom, who is sequestered at Country Meadows go to the annual dinner, but that I also should not attend this family celebration. And upon further reflection, I realized that really none of us should attend!! And then my thoughts were confirmed when my sister contacted me to say that Easter dinner 2020 was cancelled.

Although I breathed a sigh of relief that we would all be taking care of one another by not being together on April 12th – then it hit me – that not only would there be no Easter dinner, but most

likely there will be no Easter worship service here at Good Shepherd on April 12th.

I was filled with a deep sadness as I grieved the potential loss of not celebrating God's victory over death on its designated day (April 12) with you and the loss of this time with my family.

As we live in and through these times of uncertainty and unknowing about what the future holds, I am finding so much that I have taken for granted that will never be the same or I will never look at in the same way when we are at the end of this storm.

We are indeed encountering a world altering event that has touched every aspect of our lives and has in these two short weeks challenged us not only to think differently but to act differently –

In our gospel text this morning, we join Jesus and his disciples as they too are encountering a world altering event, they too are frightened and anxious about their safety and well being, they too are looking at practices and traditions that they have taken for granted and wondering what living through these scary times will mean for their future.

And as we hear the gospel writer Mark tell this story, let us remember that this is being recorded at least 30 years after the actual death and resurrection of Jesus. A time when things for the early Christians in Jerusalem have gone from bad to worse – as the temple has been (or is about to be) destroyed – as there are divisions and disagreements among Jesus followers about what past practices need to be adhered to in their present situation and what do not – and as the Christians are actually being persecuted and killed for being followers of Christ.

So with all that context in mind – we hear Mark describe this conversation with Jesus and his disciples that occurred two days before they shared their last meal together.

As the disciples marvel at the magnificence of the temple, where they have come time and time again to meet God in all his glory – Jesus tells the disciples that this temple (this building) and this way of experiencing God's presence is about to change – and that this temple, where they have come to make sacrifices so that they could be ritually cleansed and restored to righteousness is no longer going to be needed – and that God was about to break out from behind the curtain and leave the building (this temple)

What I hear Jesus preparing his disciples for in this text - is that soon very soon – they are going to find God working and experience God's presence in places they never imagined.

The first of which, of course, will be on an old wooden cross on a hill outside of the holy city of Jerusalem, where their beloved Jesus will hang and bleed until he breathes his last breath.

It will be on an old wooden cross, where the disciples will soon encounter and where we still encounter the unconditional love of God.

And it is on and through that old wooden cross that we come to know and see the power of God – for it is on and through the cross that we see God defeating death once and for all and it is on and through the cross where we receive the forgiveness of our sins and the promise of everlasting life with God

And following the resurrection, the empty cross becomes the symbol of God's victory over death, around which we will gather

to proclaim what God has done for us through the life, the death and the resurrection of his beloved son, Jesus.

And it is this empty cross of Christ that binds us together even when we cannot be physically present with one another.

For, it is the unconditional love of God that has been revealed to us on that cross (not the building) that reminds us of whose we are and that even in our darkest hour we are never on our own and we are never alone. God is with us.

God is with us in the midst of all our despair – giving each and every one of us “our daily bread” - that is - exactly what God knows that we need to get through each and every day of this crisis.

God’s got this.

And God WILL bring us through these challenging times and there will be RESURRECTION and there will be NEW LIFE at the end of this storm. For that is who God is and what God does. God is steadfast and will never leave us or forsake us and God is our creator, who will out of the rubble from this storm create new life.

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

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

AMEN