

Coronavirus Shut-down  
Sermon preached on March 15, 2019  
By  
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Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. AMEN

On Monday as I looked at the reading for this week, I thought I had a good idea of what I would be preaching about this morning. I planned to talk about how Jesus, and the disciples and the crowd had arrived in Jerusalem and they had been welcomed to the city as if they were royalty, people throwing down their cloaks and palm branches as Jesus rode through the streets on a donkey – to cheers of Hosannah, Glory to God in the highest, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord– and it was only a few days after that amazing welcome – that Jesus - as he was speaking the truth about what was really happening within this holy city – that he had really ticked off the religious elite and now they were trying to trip him up – so they could discredit him, accuse him of a crime, and get rid of him – and I had every intention of exploring what it must have been like for the disciples as they watched what almost seemed like Jesus self destruct – and there was not anything they could do to stop it

Kind of like this week – as we are watching this coronavirus epidemic unfold – the likes of which none of us have experienced in our life time –and as we hear of potential cases at Reading Hospital - we feel this virus creeping closer and closer to us – we call our loved ones urging them to be safe – and our children call us urging us to make wise and safe choices

What a week – like no other I have ever experienced – as local and national sports events got canceled, as nursing homes closed their doors to visitors, as workers are having their temperatures taken before they can enter their place of employment, as grocery store parking lots are jammed and check out lines are a mile long, as the United States declares a state of National Emergency, as the colleges have closed their doors and sent their students home for the rest of

the semester, as the schools have closed, as libraries close their doors, as churches are closing – and as of tomorrow the doors to the Magic Kingdom in Disney World will close.

Things do not just feel different, but things are different – as here at Good Shepherd - we are facing something I never imagined I would agree to – that is weeks of not gathering in this place to worship – weeks of not singing together – weeks of not being present with and for one another

In light of what has been happening this week – there were two FB posts that have helped me put this week in perspective – one was Luther’s explanation of the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment – thou shall not murder – and the other from a friend from seminary

Luther explains in the small catechism that what “thou shall not murder” really means – is that – we are to fear and love God, so that we neither endanger or harm the lives of our neighbors, but instead help and support them in all of their life’s needs

That is what our decision to physically distance ourselves from one another is all about – so that we we do not harm or endanger our neighbor - which in this situation might really mean life or death for our neighbor

We need to make changes to the way we have always done things – in order to care for and protect our brothers and sisters here in this place - and so for the well being of one another – we will be making sacrifices we never planned for and probably never imagined in our wildest dreams

as we embark on a Lenten season where the stuffed animals will sit at the foot of the altar – unclear when or if they will ever be given away –

a Lenten season that will not end with the triumphant parade of waving palm branches and the children scattered around the church yard gathering eggs –

a Lenten season where for the sake of the other it is crucial that we keep our distance from each other – for in this time of unknown consequences – we may unknowing be a carrier and inadvertently endanger someone here today

In the past few days, we have just been bombarded with the unthinkable – just as the unthinkable was happening right before the disciples eyes when they reached Jerusalem – so the unthinkable and unimaginable is happening right before our eyes – and the impact of this corona epidemic has become a reality we can not ignore nor escape

I don't know about you – but I am exhausted trying to figure out the right thing to do – trying to make decisions to keep people safe – trying to be patient and flexible and careful and still stay optimistic and hopeful – all at a time when we are at the mercy of the uncertainty of the unknown path this virus will take and at what time it will raise it's ugly head

So for as long as it takes - let's do as Jesus has taught us –

take care of one another – call one another – send a note – shoot off an email –

take care of yourself – get some fresh air and some sunshine – and enjoy an afternoon nap or two .

And pray for one another – pray that the virus does not reach us – and if it does pray for healing and restoration - and pray for God to give us each and every day the daily bread that only God knows that we need.

As I said earlier there were two FB posts that stuck with me this week – the first about Luther's explanation of the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment – and the second is a FB post I saw yesterday from Kari, one of my seminary classmates and it is my request of you as we physically distance ourselves from one another.

As my friend writes –

Brothers and sisters in Christ, pray for your pastors and lay leaders. You may not agree with the decisions that are being made, but they are doing the absolute best they can, prayerfully, to respond faithfully and out of deep care for their communities.

There is no instruction manual for how to pastor a congregation through a serious pandemic.

There is no instruction manual for how to be a congregation's Council in a pandemic.

There is no instruction manual for our synod staffs for how to minister to hundreds of congregations in many different contexts in a pandemic.

We're all figuring this out as we go, making difficult, and sometimes heartbreaking decisions with the best possible intentions after fervent prayer.

None of us had any kind of training on what to do in this kind of situation, so we're learning as we go and taking our best, most informed, best-intended guesses.

So pray for us, your leaders, in this time of crisis.

So, people of God – in spite of our decision to not gather in this place for the next few weeks, we walk together united in Christ in this time of crisis – take care of one another, take care of yourself and pray for all who will suffer loss of wages, loss of hope and loss of life.

And trust that God walks with us and will lead us through the storm to the Easter morning of this crisis – where there will always be resurrection and new life.

And so my brothers and sisters in Christ - may God be with you until we meet again!!

AMEN