

St. Paul's Epistle – May 2020

Christianity Has Been Handling Epidemics for 2000 Years

We find ourselves facing an old enemy. Call it a plague, epidemic, scourge, virus, or huge inconvenience. It leads to the same outcome—much suffering, and for some, even death—sometimes death in the tens of millions of people.

The Christian church has quite a history of dealing with these plague periods. Just to name a few:

- 1) There was the terrible Antonine Plague of the 2nd century, which might have killed off a quarter of the Roman Empire. Who led the charge to care for the sick? Christians. And they offered a spiritual model whereby plagues were not the work of angry and capricious deities but the product of a broken Creation in revolt against a loving God.
- 2) Then there was the Plague of Cyprian in the third century, named for a bishop who gave a colorful account of this disease in his sermons. Probably related to Ebola, and besides killing many, it triggered the explosive growth of Christianity. Cyprian told his hearers to not grieve for the plague victims (who live in heaven), but to redouble efforts to care for the living. Others took notice of how Christians attended to the needs of the sick.
- 3) A century later, the pagan emperor Julian, during another plague time, complained how the Christians would even take care of their unbelieving neighbors.
- 4) Jumping ahead more than a thousand years (and yes, there were plagues during those 1,000 years as well), we come to the time of Luther. In 1527, when the bubonic plague hit Wittenberg, he noted that some tried to flee. Luther, on the other hand decided to stay. His refusal to flee cost his daughter Elizabeth her life. Luther said, in his tract, *Whether Christians Should Flee the Plague*, “we should all be willing to die at our posts...Christian pastors cannot abandon their congregations.” “The plague does not dissolve our duties: it turns them to crosses, on which we must be prepared to die.”

And there have been “plague” times between 1527 until the present COVID-19 time. Many thought that this sort of thing couldn't happen again. We have modern medicine and better, more efficient ways to deal with such things.

And yet, here we are. What is to be our response? Luther's tract did encourage Christians to obey quarantine orders, fumigate their houses, and take precautions to avoid spreading the sickness. But he also encouraged us to be about the business of why we are still here, “to love our neighbor as ourselves,” to “care for one another.” As I heard one pastor state, “we care for our neighbor even if it is an inconvenience; we enthusiastically participate in aggressive sanitation measures and social distancing for the benefit of our neighbor.” As the world wakes up to the fact that the age of epidemics is not over, through the church the work goes on.

pastor

Our Help Comes from the Lord

“I scream, you scream, we all scream for ??????? (an end to the COVID-19 crisis!). Thankfully there is still ice cream available in the meantime!

In one way or another we have all been affected by the COVID-19 virus outbreak. There are many schools, businesses, churches, etc. that have had to stay closed until things change. We are to practice physical distancing, wear masks, and wash our hands often, and use hand sanitizer when washing is not available.

All this spells trouble, trauma, stress, anxiety, worry, concern about whether or not things will ever be able to return to “normal.” And what will “normal” look like in the church, at least for a time, when we are given the OK to gather? No doubt, handshaking will be out. There will be physical distancing (even when sitting in the pews), perhaps everyone wearing face masks. How will Holy Communion be distributed, and will it be possible to still have a fellowship time with food and drink? For a time, things will probably be very different.

And yet, with our ever-present God to help us, we will get through this. The God who saved us by His grace will bless us, keep us, and sustain us in challenging times, just as He does all the time. As one hymnwriter states: “Be still, my soul, before the Lord; On God in patience wait. God’s love, unseen, surrounds your life; God’s help will not be late” (LSB 771:4).

In the liturgical order of Matins, the liturgy begins, “O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise” (Psalm 51:15). And then we hear, “Make haste, O God, to deliver me,” and God’s people respond by stating, “Make haste to help me, O Lord” (Psalm 70:1). Yes, we pray, O Lord, for Your help and guidance—this too, shall pass.

Is there anything we can do now besides pray? Is there anything that we can learn? There is. As we should always do, but especially should remember to do in times of trouble, we can resolve to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity” (2 Peter 3:18). We can desire to grow in our witnessing, our caring for others, and walking ever closer with Jesus, for He will see us through this time of uncertainty and doubt.

Let us pray: “Almighty and most merciful God, in this earthly life we endure sufferings and death before we enter into eternal glory. Grant us grace at all times to subject ourselves to Your holy will and to continue steadfast in the true faith to the end of our lives that we may know the peace and joy of the blessed hope of the resurrection of the dead and of the glory of the world to come; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.” (Collect #279 in LSB, p. 317)

Pastor

Worship Committee Notes

As we continue to worship in heart and home, we confess our sins and are assured of forgiveness; we praise our Lord for his grace and mercy; we share the Word of God; we join in prayer; and, we are blessed to continue our lives of service to the glory of His name.

The lessons, hymns, and sermon topics for our day of worship are chosen to reflect the themes of the seasons of the church year and help us to become a part of the act of worship. We actively participate in worship with reverence and joy. Worship is a time of fellowship with the Lord when we adore, pray, praise and give thanks. (Summarized from CPH "The Way We Worship" tract)

May our worship be blessed as we hear and read the sermon, join on-line services, devotions and Bible Studies, pray and sing praises to our risen Lord! We are grateful for all the resources now available and for all those supporting our worship.

OUR SERVICES IN MAY:

Sunday, May 3rd—Fourth Sunday of Easter (Good Shepherd Sunday)

Lessons: Acts 2:42-47, 1Peter 2:19-25, John 10:1-10

Hymns from LSB: #469 "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today"; #709 "The King of Love My Shepherd Is"; #685 "Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus"; #740 "I Am Jesus' Little Lamb" and #710 "The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want".

Sermon: "He Is" based on John 10:1-10

Sunday, May 10th

Lessons: Acts 6:1-9; 7:2a, 51-60, 1 Peter 2:2-10 and John 14:1-14

Hymns from LSB: #474 "Alleluia! Jesus Is Risen"; #737 Rejoice, My Heart, Be Glad and Sing"; #633 "At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing"; #722 "Lord Take My Hand and Lead Me"; #526 "You Are the Way; Through You Alone".

Sermon: "Jesus Speaks to Troubled Hearts" John 14:1-14

Sunday, May 17th

Lessons: Acts 17:16-31, 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21

Hymns from LSB: # 484 "Make Songs of Joy"; #556 "Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice"; #490 "Jesus Lives! The Victory's Won"; #557 Seek Where You May to Find a Way"

Sermon: "To the Unknown God" John 14: 15-21

Sunday, May 24th

Lessons: Acts 1:12-26, 1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-11, John 17:1-11

Hymns from LSB: #493 " A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing"; #653 "In Christ There is No East or West"; #730 "What Is the World to Me"; #482; "This Joyful Eastertide"; #701 " Draw Us to Thee"

Sermon: "Jesus Prays" John 17:1-11

Sunday, May 31st - Day of Pentecost

Lessons: Numbers 11:24-30, Acts 2:1-21, John 7:37-39

Hymns from LSB: #498 "Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest"; #500 "Creator Spirit, by Whose Aid"; #496 "Holy Spirit, Light Divine"; #503 "O day Full of Grace"

Sermon: "The Holy Spirits' Coming at Pentecost" Acts 2:1-21

Blessed to worship, Karen Broach, Worship Committee Member

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"Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Never rely on what you think you know. Remember the Lord in everything you do, and He will show you the right way. Never let yourself think that you are wiser than you are; simply obey the Lord and refuse to do wrong."

Proverbs 3:5-7