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Pestilence and the Cross

- Pastor Sorenson

King David is one of the greatest king's in the history of Israel. While he had great success on the battlefield and grew and expanded the kingdom, these things are not the primary reason he is considered to be a great king. Instead, it's because he remained faithful to the Lord. Sadly, this would not be the case for so many of the kings of Israel who turned and worshiped false gods.

Yet this does not mean that David always acted faithfully. We certainly know of his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Bathsheba's husband Uriah. There is also another great sin of David recorded in Scripture that is especially appropriate right now, recorded in both 2 Samuel 24 and in 1 Chronicles 21. David desired to have a census of the people of Israel taken. God sent word to David through His messenger that this would bring guilt upon Israel, but David ignored the warning of God and went ahead with the census. While we are not fully told why the Lord warned David not to take the census, we do realize David's great sin in ignoring the Word of the Lord.

God was displeased with David's sin and, indeed, in the guilt of the entire nation of Israel. As punishment for this sin, David had three choices: three years of famine, three months of devastation by his enemies, or three days of pestilence from the Lord. David chose to fall into the hand of the Lord.

Then we hear this: "The Lord sent a pestilence on Israel, and 70,000 men of Israel fell. And God sent the angel to Jerusalem to destroy it, but as he was about to destroy it, the Lord saw, and he relented from the calamity. And he said to the angel who was working destruction, 'It is enough; now stay your hand.' And the angel of the Lord was standing by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. And David lifted his eyes and saw the angel of the Lord standing between earth and heaven, and in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces." Upon David setting up an altar and offering sacrifices, we finally hear, "Then the Lord commanded the angel, and he put his sword back into its sheath."

Now, there is much to learn from this passage. First, we see here that pestilence itself is from the Lord. Even the pandemic we are now experiencing is not outside of His control. This brings us great comfort because we know that God has fixed its time and its limits. It will not go beyond what God has ordained. Second, we see God's great grace to deliver His people from what their sin deserves. All sin deserves death, and even as many may suffer and die from a pestilence, nevertheless the Lord pulls back the destruction from killing everybody in order to show grace and mercy.

But third, and most importantly of all, we see how God will deliver us from pestilence and death and how He will show us mercy. As the angel of the Lord was moving throughout the nation bringing death, He stopped just outside of Jerusalem. The geographical meaning is so important! The angel of the Lord, who is Jesus, stopped outside of Jerusalem, sheathed His death-bringing sword, and brought grace, mercy, and life, to those who repented of their sin and fell on their faces before the Lord.

That's exactly what happened at the cross! Jesus Christ was taken just outside of Jerusalem to be nailed to the cross. He certainly could have listened to the crowds and come down from the cross to bring the wages of our sin upon us, but He didn't. Instead, He sheathed His sword and submitted Himself to death on our behalf. He ended the plague of our sin and death by destroying it once and for all with His blood. Now we, who repent of our sin and fall on our faces before the Lord, see the grace and mercy of God as we look to the angel of the Lord on the cross who sheathes the sword of death and pestilence for good.

As we face the various pestilences of this life, then, like Covid-19 and others, we do so knowing that God is in control. That God has saved us from sin and death. That, even though we may die in such a pestilence, nevertheless we will not die forever because Christ has died to give us eternal life.

This time of pestilence, then, is like all other times when sickness and death surround us. It's a time for us to repent of our sins, recognizing that these things happen as a result of sin. It's a time for us to return to the Lord our God, for He is gracious and merciful, even in the midst of a pestilence. It's a time for us to mourn the fact that we must fast from joining together in church and to realize how important weekly worship together really is.

But it's also a time for us to pray. Pray that the Lord will sheath this awful sword. Pray that the Lord would guard and keep us safe during this time. Pray that the Lord would forgive us all of our sins. Pray that the Lord would teach us to value and treasure worship, especially the hearing of His Word and the reception of the Lord's Supper. Pray that the Lord would turn our eyes back to His Son, who suffered and died outside of Jerusalem so that we may have life. For soon, it will be Easter where we see that the Lord indeed is in control of all things, even global pandemics, and that His resurrection has sheathed death's sword once and for all.

Bible Studies Online!

During this period when we are unable to meet, join Pastor Sorenson online for weekly Bible studies.

- On **Tuesdays**, we will be studying a book of the Bible, beginning with the book of Philippians.
- On **Wednesdays**, we will be studying the upcoming Hymn of the Day.
- On **Thursdays**, we will be reading through portions of the Large Catechism.
- Each study begins at **2:00 PM** on the church Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/StPeterEvangelicalLutheranChurch>) and is also available to view in its entirety even after the study concludes.

Sermons and Devotional Resources:

- Weekly sermons will be posted on our church website (<http://www.stpeterwaymansville.com>) on the sermon page under the "At St. Peter" tab. (Direct link to that page - http://www.stpeterwaymansville.org/?page_id=417)
- You can also find helpful resources for your home devotions on the "Devotional Resources" page under the "Resources" tab (http://www.stpeterwaymansville.org/?page_id=489). Now is a great time to begin, continue, and strengthen a home devotional pattern by yourself and with your family.
- The April-June Portals of Prayer are now available in the narthex. You can drop by and pick one up or contact Pastor or the church office to have one delivered.

Lord's Supper: If you would like to receive the Lord's Supper during this time, please contact Pastor Sorenson via call, text, or email. His phone number is 812-371-1151 and his email is pastoresorenson@gmail.com. He would be happy to meet you at the church for this purpose or to bring it to your home, making sure at all times to take the necessary safety precautions.

May these resources assist you as you continue to hear the Word of God and cry out to Him in prayer.

SPECIAL WORSHIP SERVICES

Holy Week and Easter:

With our ability to meet during Holy Week and Easter appearing to be in jeopardy, we do have a contingency plan. Covid-19, like anything else in the world, will not take the joy of Easter away from us! Once we are able to meet together again as a church in worship, our schedule will be as follows. The first Sunday back we will celebrate Palm Sunday and have the rite of Confirmation. That next week we will observe Holy Week with our normal Holy Week services on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. The second Sunday back we will celebrate with full joy the Resurrection of our Lord. While it may be at a different time than normal, nothing will take our meditation upon Christ's death and our celebration of Christ's resurrection away from us!

EVENTS & NEWS

Cancelled Events:

The following is a list of upcoming events that have been cancelled for the time being. Many will be rescheduled for a later date:

- April Church Board and Elders' Meetings
- April Book of Concord Study & Youth Group
- 4/7: Game Night
- 4/11: Easter Egg Hunt
- 4/12: Easter Breakfast
- 4/19: Quarterly Voters' Meeting
- 5/9: Golf Outing

Library:

In an effort to build up our library and provide good theological resources for the congregation, we will have a special Book of the Month. The Book of the Month will be available in the Parish Hall library for you to look through and read. You may take the book home to read as well, but we ask that you please do not hold onto it for too long so other people can enjoy it as well. The April Book of the Month is *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?: 12 False Christs* by Matthew Richard. Here is an excerpt from the book: "Like all the Santa Clauses scattered across our malls during the Christmas season, there are dozens upon dozens of look-alike false christs scattered across America's churches and in homes. Like all the Elvises roaming the streets of Vegas, these look-alike christs roam in and out of our spiritual conversations and lives and beliefs. These christs may look like Jesus and sound like Jesus, but they are nothing more than counterfeits. They are pseudo christs. They are false christs. Like the mall Santa Clauses and the Vegas Elvises, they are not real, even though they are embraced, loved, promoted, revered, and sometimes taught by well-meaning, yet misinformed Christians."

FROM THE OFFICE

Electronic Donations:

During this time of absence from our services, if you would like to make contributions to the church through your personal online banking, it is very easy!

- Call the church office to get the church's bank account number. You **do not** have to give the church any of your personal banking information. Amy can be reached at (812) 342-4921 or (812) 390-2318.
- Use your own bank's online banking system to set up a transfer to the church account. Most systems will walk you through this set-up process step-by-step.
- This can be a one-time payment, something you do each week/as you can, or a recurring debit. Your online banking program will allow you to choose if the payment is recurring or not. This method of payment **does not** have to be something that is automatically deducted from your account. You can control when and how often you make a contribution.
- To assist in tracking and recording contributions to the correct contributor numbers, it is recommended that you send Amy an email (amy@stpeterwaymansville.com) indicating the date and amount of the contribution. When online contributions are posted to the church's banks account, there is no identifying information about the sender.
- Don't hesitate to call Amy with further questions.

Contact Information:

Once we are able to join together in worship again, we would like to be able to contact everyone in a quick and timely manner. If you could please contact Amy or Pastor to update your contact information, especially phone number and email, that would us tremendously and be greatly appreciated. Keep an eye on the church Facebook page for the most up-to-date information and help spread the word when that joyous day comes when we can come back together. Thank you!

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