

Easter 1 2020

Faith Over Fear

Isaiah 43:1-12 / Luke 24:36-49

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“But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, Or Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.” Such great words to reflect on during such uncertain times as these. God became flesh and dwelt among us. As the Son, Jesus paid the price of sin and died in our place. Overcoming death, Jesus made it possible for all mankind to receive the grace and mercy of God and find rest in His eternal paradise. This same God knows you by name and claims you as His own.

It is through the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, the Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ that all nations are called together as One; called together as one in Christ, called as one to put our trust and faith in Him...and to be not provoked unto fear. God's love is the comfort given to all His children and knowing each of us by name we may pass through the trials and tribulations of this world knowing that God is with us.

“When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.”

More good words but, it would seem that the Corona Virus Pandemic has won the battle of fear. There are no flowers on the altar, no people in the pews, no coffee brewing in the back, no hugs between friends, no greeters at the door, no stories of the week to be shared. Yes, it seems that our confinement is in response to an unseen thing that is raging through our humanity. But! even in the lack of these things we are reminded that nothing can separate us from the love of God! We are united as one in the body of Jesus Christ and from our several vantage points we are together in our worship, in worship of the one who binds us together and knows each one of us by name! It is our fortitude and our resilience that illustrates to the world the love of God freely given.

We see today, in light of this pandemic, the different parts of the body working together to express the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a unification and solidarity that we have not seen for decades, centuries or even millennia. The Lord our God is no longer whispering. No matter which side you are on concerning the extent and potential of this virus, we, as brothers and sisters in Christ are adamantly aware of the battle ensuing between the wheat and the chaff. The devil is trying to close our churches and the virus is taking lives...How are we to fight such a battle? The answer is simpler than you think...FAITH!

In every life the rain must fall and periodically the monsoon season arrives. But that is no reason to loose your faith, but all the more reason to reconsider life and its purpose. The Christian response to pain is different from those of worldly perspectives. Since none of us can escape the stings of life, our viewpoints on suffering rely so much on our understanding of such trials. It does not matter how much we suffer but how fully we understand the place of suffering in our lives. St. Ambrose of Milan wrote of this way back in the fourth century:

"If the occasion demands it, (writes St. Ambrose) a wise man will readily accept bodily infirmity and even offer his whole body up to death for the sake of Christ...This same man is not affected in spirit or broken with bodily pain if his health fails him. He is consoled by his struggle for perfection in the virtues. Hearing this, the man of the world is quite likely to exclaim: "What an idea! How can a man 'readily accept' illness and disease?"

An unbeliever cannot accept such an answer. The unbeliever would say that our current pandemic is proof that God does not exist and that life is only chance reacting to chance...What the unbeliever does not put in the equation is the action of the freewill of humanity to live in sin. In doing so mankind accepts pain, suffering, and pandemics as a part of life of which there is no escape. Some will fall in their worldly oppositions to Christ's offer of salvation, but it is the prayer of every Christian that the Gospel of Jesus Christ will turn hearts and bring sinners into the way.

I find it interesting how the human race reacts to a virus they cannot see verses how they confront the guidance of the invisible Holy Spirit. That

which **leads** to death is a symptom of sin and that which **leads** to everlasting life with the Father is healing power of the ultimate love of God. The evidence of both is seen in the reaction of those infected. Are you under the influence and fear of sin? Does the Corona Virus make you so afraid that life has ceased to have any meaning? There is an answer. It is found in the love of God the Father who, after laying down the life of His Son for our sins chose to dwell within each one of us, giving us the assurance of our salvation. The Corona Virus can only affect our physical health in the here and now because the nature of sin only exists in this world. It is the Holy Spirit that we must confide in, it is the Holy Spirit that we must let lead the way because it is the Holy Spirit that affects our spiritual health for our betterment because the Holy Spirit is directly opposed to sin.

In our reading from Luke's Gospel we see Jesus entering into the midst of His disciples and in their fearful condition Jesus simply said unto them, "*Peace be unto you.*" This is what our Lord wants for all of us, to find peace in Him and peace with each other. Sin will cause disruption in this life and with it will come pain, but our trust in the Messiah and our love for each other will save the day.

Jesus when he had given up the ghost entered Sheol and in that dark place he brought the light and the power of God breaking death's hold. The resurrection of Jesus is the final victory...nothing more needs to be done; "*The strife is o'er, the battle done, the victory of life is won. Alleluia.*" Jesus as he rises to new life rolls away the stone that represents the finality of death. Death has lost its sting. Death, our enemy, has been overcome. The stone that blocked the way to eternal life carried with it the sins of mankind as our Lord crushed its head with his own foot.

While my journey has not led me to crucifixion, it has led me to events that have brought me to my knees, crying out in despair to God, "Let this cup pass from me." It is in these moments that we must ask ourselves, "Will we lean on the truth of the Gospel, that the light has overcome the darkness? Or will we lean on the world's gospel, which wants us to believe that darkness is all we have?"

Stay strong in your faith in Jesus Christ and stay safe at home. In the Lord we are always together.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.