

Lent 3 2020

Ephesians 5; Luke 11:14–28

St. John Lutheran Church, Palmer, KS

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear family in Christ, “We are weak, but his is strong.”

What a difference one week can make. We are much weaker than we let on. Weaker individually, weaker as a nation, weaker as human creatures on this planet. We are exposed. We are not so nearly as powerful as we think. Even the smallest of things, a tiny virus, can bring us to our knees and cause panic as we realize how fragile our lives are and that we are not in control.

You will not all get the flu or the Coronavirus but you will all die unless Christ returns first. This world will not last forever. It is wearing out. Let these days remind you of God’s judgment. For the final day will come when no self-isolation will hide you from judgment. Prepare now. Now is the hour of grace. Learn to confess with St. Paul: “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

The world thinks that this life is all there is. It panics—buys toilet paper because it has nothing else. In contrast, the Christian is a co-heir with Christ of eternal life. He has a longer-term perspective—an eternal perspective. In the meantime, he also has the 10 Commandments to order his thinking.

The 10 Commandments are the way the created world works. Think of them as the underlying fabric for human life as God designed it to work. So whenever things seem to fall apart at the seams, we always want to run our thinking through the commandments to get our thinking in order. This week the First, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Commandments are especially relevant.

The First Commandment is always in play. What does the Christian do in times of public unrest? He lets God be God. First, we are to let God be God alone by fearing him above all things. Jesus says: “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear the one who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” There is a fate worse than bodily death or financial loss. Fear God. Order your life by him and not by the dictates of fear and panic over the latest disaster. Second, we are also to let God be God alone by loving him above all things. Revelation declares of the saints that “they overcame [the Devil] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.” And third, we are to let God be God alone by trusting in him above all things. Jesus says: “There will be ... distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world... Now when these things begin to take place,

straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” I say to you Christians, rejoice this day. You are still redeemed. Jesus wins and comes again. The Christian may set his heart at ease and trust in the Lord, saying: “We *know*” (not wish or hope but know!) “that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

Next, the Third Commandment to sanctify the holy day reminds us that there is but one thing needful. Hint: It’s not toilet paper. Jesus said to Martha: “You are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful.” The Devil loves nothing more than to cause fear and panic and then also cause us to lose access to the Word and Sacraments or be fearful of receiving them. Well, nice try Satan. We aren’t going to fall for it! I’m not saying there can never be a time to stay home or postpone church services, but the Christian will always find a way to make use of God’s Word. To the Psalms, and to prayer. Such times call for more church and home devotions and less TV rather than the other way around. To the life-giving communion in Jesus’ risen body and blood. Be not afraid. Trust in the Lord. This is no ordinary food! Medicine for the body can be found in any number of places, but only in Christ’s church can I receive the medicine of immortality.

Next, the Fourth Commandments reminds us that we need to honor authority. The church’s job is to teach us how to die well through faith in Christ. The state’s job is to protect life. You might agree with all the measures and cancellations or not. You may think they’ve gone too far or not far enough. Whatever the case, honor them insofar as they do not command you to sin. Put the best construction on things. They don’t fully know what they are dealing with. They don’t want our doctors, nurses, and hospitals to be overwhelmed all at once. But as you honor authority, remember that all authority is from God. Keep in mind that the First Commandment is First and that the Third comes before the Fourth. The things of God shall be of higher significance for you than the things of man. As St. Paul declares: “Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

Finally, the Fifth Commandment reminds us to protect our neighbor’s life and support him in every physical need. Do not hurt or harm your neighbor. Look out for each other, especially those not in or on the fringes of families. Be mindful of those who due to health or age need to limit contact with others. Not everyone will react in the same way because we are all different and have different circumstances. Do not think that you are the exception to good hygiene. It only takes one.

The devil loves chaos, but the commandments give us order and right-thinking. We also know that Ever since Adam the world is under God’s judgment. God sends suffering to drive us to the cross of his Son so that we would see our weakness and the need for his mercy. If God wants to judge humanity through a virus, then so be it. It may be that this will be but a little warning, a slap on the wrist. But if God wants to judge mankind for our destruction of unborn

lives, our despising of marriage, and our other sins, he will. He is patient and long suffering, but history shows that he will not remain silent forever. God is just. He is also merciful. He works all things for good. In the face of disease we should pray that world would repent and realize again the value and fragility of human life; the need to protect and provide for the most vulnerable among us from womb to life's natural end.

We are weak. But he is strong. When plague comes, the world scatters, plays blame games, and freaks out. But Christians go to the Lord in his Word. They go to church, to their prayers, to their Bibles. They take up Bible-rich hymns and sing even louder. The world looks for salvation now; for a cure; a way out. Christians know they already have salvation and a home; a stronger Man who has rescued them from death and hell.

When we are weak, then we are strong, for then we have nothing but to cling to Jesus. The strongest faith is the one that looks the most to Jesus. The strongest Christian is the one whose weaknesses causes him to cling to Christ all the tighter. In short, Christ is everything, we are nothing.

Christ is the stronger one. "Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." Christians are not conformed to the world's anxiety and fears (Romans 12:2). We believe that God loves us (1 John 4:9). We believe he sent his Son to be our brother according to the flesh (John 1:14). We believe that having made sacrifice for our sins through his death, our Lord Jesus rose and ascended to sit at the Father's right hand (Romans 8:34). We have a high priest who knows our plight. This changes everything, even Coronavirus.

The eyes of faith see the world for what it is. No virus, stock market crash, or panicked media can rob Christians of their hope that Jesus will give his victory and dominion over sin and death to all who believe in him (Romans 8:37). When Christians get sick and are dying, they haven't lost God's blessing. Rather their confidence is strengthened (Romans 5:3). Sufferings teach that nothing in this world lasts. God's love for us in Christ will endure forever. For those who have been baptized into God's name, he has promised resurrection and eternal life. God is faithful and he will do it.

Dear family of God, it is true: We are weak. But he is strong. Sing with me...

May God give us His Word and Spirit so that we who are weak may ever trust in Jesus who is strong.

*Come soon, Lord Jesus.*

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.