



St. John's Newsletter

April 2020



Jesus' Resurrection Calms Our Fears

“Do not be afraid! I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here. He has risen, just as he said.” (Matthew 28:5-6 – EHV)

We've been through this before. It may not seem like it, but we've seen global pandemics before—and have gotten through them. In fact, there have been many world-wide health crises throughout the history of the world. One took place about a hundred years ago called, “The Spanish Flu,” this pandemic hit about 500 million people (about a third of the world's population at the time) in 1918. And depending on the source, it killed anywhere from 17 to 100 million people. My Great-grandfather was a pastor in Arizona at the time and in a sermon for December 8, 1918 he began his sermon, “By the grace of God we have been permitted to meet here again to worship him and to hear his divine message after having been prevented from doing so by the measures taken by the health authorities to stamp out the Spanish influenza epidemic.” We've been through this before—churches have been forced to close before in the United States—and the Church survived!

As horrible as the Spanish Flu was, there was a much greater world-wide pandemic during the Luther's time. It goes by many names: The Bubonic Plague, the Black Plague, the Black Death, etc. Anywhere from 100 to 200 million people died by this plague from the years 1347-1351 alone! That is 30-60% of Europe/Asia's population at the time. Although this pandemic peaked in the 1300's, waves of it came and went for centuries—even during the time of Luther in the 1500's. A wave of the Black Plague hit Wittenberg, Germany, where Luther lived, in 1527. Many people fled. Luther stayed—citing his responsibility to care for the physical and spiritual needs of others. Luther was led to write a pamphlet about the plague (this is getting some publicity online lately because of the Coronavirus) called, *Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague*. While Luther wasn't himself struck by the Black Plague, his son, Hans, became sick, as did his wife, Katie, who was pregnant with their second child. Both Hans and Katie recovered. However, as a result of Katie's contracting the plague while pregnant, infant daughter, Elizabeth, would die at the age of nine months. Luther (Katie, not Martin) is quoted as saying about Elizabeth's death, “The good Lord gave me a little girl, the sweet little Elizabeth. I am happy and grateful to the Lord! Here, the plague is dead and buried. However, it seemed as if the terrible scourge had marked the child, even before she was born. After eight months, the sweet little Elizabeth said goodbye to her father and her mother to go to Christ, passing through death into life.” Six months after Elizabeth's death, Magdalena was born; but at the age of 13, she too became sick and was called to her heavenly home. While we know very little about Elizabeth's death, we do know what Martin Luther said at the grave site and when his family returned home, “There is a resurrection of the flesh...My daughter is now fitted out in body and soul. We Christians now have nothing to complain about. We know that it should and must be so, for we are altogether certain about eternal life.”

Why this history lesson on deadly outbreaks and death? Two reasons: 1. As mentioned above—we've been here before. God's creation and God's Church have faced deadly pestilences time and time again (and only God knows how deadly this latest disease will be). And in the end, the Church has survived as God has seen us through it all! The Lord of creation rules over all things and they happen just as he wills—he is in complete control at all times, he is our refuge and strength, and our ever-present help in times of

trouble. And we know that no matter what happens, the Lord will make everything work out for our good. 2. The second reason is to help us understand where our comfort lies in times of distress and uncertainty: Christ's resurrection and ours! Look at the example of the Luthers. In the face of a deadly plague, suffering with deep sadness and distress over the death of their daughters, the Luthers found comfort in the resurrection from the dead. Look at the confidence Katie had that her infant daughter Elizabeth was with the Lord saying that she went "to Christ, passing through death into life." And Luther at the death of 13 year-old Magdalene also expressed confidence in eternal life and the resurrection of the flesh. The Luthers knew that there is life after death—that their two daughters passed on from this veil of tears, from a world full of diseases, pain, and death, to a perfect life in paradise with our Savior.

Over the last few weeks I have often thought about how so many people are afraid are afraid of the Coronavirus. They are afraid of the disease because they are afraid of dying and so many people are afraid of dying because they don't know Jesus as their Savior and they don't have any certainty about eternal life. But that is not us, that is not us as Christians. Look at our verse above—a group of women, looking to anoint Jesus' body were afraid and confused when they saw the stone rolled away, the empty tomb, and the angel. But their fears were taken away—how? By the news of Christ's resurrection! Jesus, who was crucified—who had died and was buried—had risen from the dead. He was no longer in the tomb and now he lives. Christ defeated death, crushed Satan's head, and gave that victory to us, as he promises us, **because I live, you also will live** (John 14:19). And notice that last part of the verse, **just as he said**. Jesus did what no one else thought he would do—he rose from the dead! And it happened on the third day just as he had told his followers. In verse seven of Matthew 28 the angels tell the women to go and tell the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead. May we too tell others about Christ's power over death and the things that cause death. May we always be prepared to give others the reason for the hope and confidence that we have (1 Peter 3:15),

The Lord keeps all his promises—even his promise to rise from the dead. And if Jesus kept that promise, he will also keep all his promises to you. He promises that he will never leave you forsake you (Hebrews 13:5); that he will make all things work out for our good (Romans 8:28); and that we will live even though we die (John 11:25). These truths and promises have sustained Christians in times of uncertainty, trouble, and death for centuries—just as they did the Luthers. Only the good Lord what will be the end result of this latest disease. And that's good enough for us to know—the Lord is in control, he has seen us through perilous times before, and in the end, he casts our eyes toward heaven and the perfect, eternal life to come. May this truth and promise comfort you, remove your fear, and encourage you in the days to come.

1 Jesus lives! The vict'ry's won!
Death no longer can appall me.
Jesus lives! Death's reign is done!
From the grave Christ will recall me.
Brighter scenes will then commence;
This shall be my confidence.

5 Jesus lives! And now is death
But the gate to life immortal;
This shall calm my trembling breath
When I pass its gloomy portal.
Faith shall cry, as fails each sense:
"Jesus is my confidence!" (CW 145 Stanzas 1, 5)



Pastor Frey

In light of all the governmental mandates being handed down in response to the Coronavirus, we are not able to be "open" at this time. Sadly, until further notice our offices will be closed, our worship services will be online only, and all other activities have been suspended (we hope to provide digital classes and other content where appropriate). If you want to get a hold of us, please email us or call our cell phones: Pastor Frey: 515-0011; Pastor Gartner: 285-2141. We pray that these ministry changes are only for the short term; and whether they are or not—we know that the Lord is in control and what he ordains is always good. God be with you till we meet (face-to-face) again!