

Rev. David R. Solum
4th Sunday in Lent
In Time of Pestilence
March 22, 2020
2 Samuel 24:15-25
Romans 5:15-21
Luke 4:38-41

You might not think it's fair, that because of one person, many people are punished. King David pridefully, in order to have confidence in the nation's ability to make war (instead of in God), took a census of his of his people. As a result, all the people of Israel were plagued with sickness. 70,000 men died! Or how about an even more extreme example: One man, Adam, sinned and every last human being after him died. That doesn't seem fair, does it? It's also not fair that thousands of young people are partying it up on the beaches of Florida and probably the ones not partying, the old and those with weakened conditions will suffer the most for it. Is that justice? Or what did Simon Peter's mother-in-law do to deserve the fever which was killing her? Why do we have a pestilence that is taking the weak, our grandparents and those already suffering with diseased and frail bodies?

The atheists, who worry more about overpopulation and evolution and consider humanity to be like fleas that infest and damage the earth, are probably secretly enjoying this. After all, they might think, this is a good natural way to decrease the population, especially those who are less productive members of society. For them, the death of humanity is a good thing. Of course, few of them, if any, would give their own lives for this cause, nor would they even curb their lifestyles so that more people can eat.

But we Christians are not pleased, nor is God pleased, who does not desire the death of the sinner. Death is called the “last enemy to be destroyed” in 1 Corinthians 15:26. It is something to be destroyed and conquered by Jesus Christ. It is likened to hell, which is called “the second death” in Revelation 20:14. It was the punishment of Adam in Genesis three. Death is ugly, scary, painful, and brings sorrow to everyone affected by it.

Romans 5:12 says, “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.” Death is the wages of sin and everyone has sinned. We were as good as dead even before we were born, because we were infected with this terminal disease at conception. Even our beloved grandparents are sinners, and so are the sick, believers and unbelievers, male and female. Unlike the coronavirus, death doesn’t favor a certain age group or portion of the population. You are guaranteed to suffer it. From the stupid partiers on the beaches to the wise, old grandparent, all fall short of the glory of God.

But, if sin and death, in which our Creator is not pleased, came to all people, how much more will the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, abound with life and salvation for everyone who believes? For it is God’s will and pleasure that we receive His kingdom. It will cure us from all life’s ills and bless us with eternal health, life, joy, comfort, blessing, and glory.

David prayed to the Lord, “Behold, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly. But these sheep, what have they done? Please let Your hand be against me and against my father’s house.” It certainly would also have been fair if David had suffered the fate of so many of his people...and in a sense he did, because he also eventually died. But, in a mysterious way, this prayer is also

very Christ-like. While David deserved it, Jesus Christ didn't. And yet, in love for His sheep – that they would be counted as innocent – Jesus asked that God's hand would be against Him. What is truly not fair, is that the sinless Son of God died. Christ did not practice social distancing, but came in the world, into the homes of infected people and, while healing them, contracted their diseases and sins. Christ put the sins of humanity on His shoulders and took full responsibility for them. He nailed our pestilence to the cross and triumphed over it, rising from the grave with immortality and glory.

David did not get what he deserved. He repented and found God's mercy. And that threshing floor David bought, upon which he built an altar? It was the site on which Solomon built the Lord's Temple. There God's gracious presence would dwell with His people. God would gather His harvest, the souls of all believers, into His kingdom by pardoning their sins and giving them salvation.

In the face of any tribulation, be it pestilence or earthquake or fire or something else, our response must be to repent. Notice I said, "our response." This isn't the time to say, those people out there in the world, or those partiers on the beaches, or this nation (meaning everyone in the country but me) – *they* all need to repent. "Let the person without sin cast the first stone," Jesus said. During this pandemic, we must all fall on our knees, bow our heads to the ground and cry out, "I deserve this and much more. I have acted wickedly. Those suffering out there, what have they done? Please lift this pandemic from us only for Jesus sake who died for us all."

How do you think God will respond to such a prayer? Angrily, in His wrath? No! Christ has redeemed you with His own blood. You are reconciled to God. God is gracious and merciful,

slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. The grace of Jesus Christ abounds for the many, for you. His cup of salvation overflows.

It might be more challenging to believe it while you are stuck in your homes, unable to come to church and receive the sacrament. But you have been baptized into Christ, and if you are baptized into Christ you have put on Christ. That means Christ is with you in your homes. And if Christ is with you, so is the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. You also have the power of the saving Gospel written on your hearts by the Holy Spirit for you to hold on to by faith. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, “True worshippers will worship in Spirit and truth.” Therefore, if you believe the Gospel and are baptized, you have the Holy Spirit and are a true worshipper, even while away from your congregation. Hence, David was a true worshipper before the Temple was built. Likewise, the remnant of believers who were in exile after the Temple was destroyed were also true worshippers. The criminal on the cross, to whom Jesus promised, “Today you will be with me in paradise,” was a true worshipper.

Take heart, God’s mercy is greater than His wrath. God is by nature loving and gracious. This pandemic will be over soon. But even if it is not, or if another calamity strikes soon afterward, God will not let destruction overtake you. You are His beloved children and citizens of His eternal kingdom. You have the power of Christ’s resurrection. You will fall sick, but Christ will heal you; you will sin, but Christ will forgive you; you will die, but Christ will raise you up again; you will lose this life, but you will gain everything back and more. *That* is not fair. It is wonderfully gracious. Amen.