

Rev. David R. Solum
Good Friday
April 10, 2020
Immanuel Lutheran, Michigan City

If you would've told me a month ago, that I'd be behind locked doors preaching to empty pews on Good Friday, I would've thought you were crazy. Look how drastically our lives have changed in a month's time. Because of this dangerous and contagious virus, we are taking extreme precaution, like nothing we've seen in our lifetimes. We've isolated ourselves; we sanitize everything we come into contact with; we limit our trips outside the home; we stopped our businesses and work except for essential services; we've postponed medical procedures and doctor visits; many have lost their employment while others are working longer and more difficult hours. Life as we know it has been flipped upside down as we contain, treat, and prevent the spread of coronavirus.

There is a sad irony to all of this. The entire world has changed due to a virus, but a far worse pandemic has been completely ignored, one which infects every single human being from conception and has a 100% mortality rate, no matter the age, ethnicity, gender, or social status. "Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned," St. Paul wrote in Romans 5:12. Adam began the pandemic with his rebellion against God's command in the Garden, and his sin spread corruption to all his offspring after him. No masks and gloves, sanitizing or isolation can prevent its spread. And what is the life expectancy for it? Everyone is born already spiritually dead, condemned, separated from the God of life.

It's interesting that we don't seem too concerned about that one. We panic when it comes to something that can harm the body, but we ignore what can take both body and soul into hell. If we sacrifice so much to prevent the spread of coronavirus, how much more should we want to give up in order to contain, treat, and cure our sin? When you think about it that way, Jesus' words in Matthew 5 don't seem quite so severe when He said, "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."

But sin is treated as though it were just a part of life or unavoidable and therefore nothing serious. People say things like, "I'm only human" in order to justify themselves. Others like to compare themselves to people worse than they are. "Well, compared to most people, I'm a pretty good person. I try to do the right thing." Nevertheless, you are still a sinner. And James 2:10 says, "Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it." And Romans 3:10 says, "No one is righteous, no, not even one."

Imagine if we treated coronavirus like we do sin! "Well, I'm not as sick with the virus as others, so I'm just going to keep living my life like I always do." Or, "I'm only human. Everyone gets sick. I don't mind a little coronavirus." Or, "I'm not going to take any precautions." And while there are some inconsiderate and unwise people that might think that way, most people are taking it seriously. And yet, the worst, most deadly and terrible disease of all, one that actually is the

cause of *all* diseases and death, gets so little attention. In fact, for the most part, the world does a fine job condoning and encouraging its spread.

We are really *all* guilty to one degree or another of not taking our rebellion against God seriously. We're like the Pharisees, who, when seeking to destroy Jesus, the Son of God, the Lord of all the living, were more worried about defiling themselves by going into Pontius Pilate's headquarters. We're more concerned about a little temporal health and wellbeing than our eternal salvation. Whenever we make excuses, downplay, hide, or condone sin, whenever we do anything but confess it, we are making God and His Word to be a lie and we are rejecting the One who only is able to cure us. But God doesn't downplay sin ever. He judges it.

Yet this Good Friday, we remember that it is not God's desire to see sinners perish, but that we receive forgiveness and live. Although humanity had distanced from God, God drew near to humanity, even becoming a man Himself. He entered our corrupt and contaminated world. Our holy and righteous God went into the homes of sinners and ate and drank with them. ...Even before we knew about social distancing, we would all have been uncomfortable among the crowds around Jesus. The smelly and dirty poor, the fevered sick, the woman with a bloody discharge, the disabled lying on mats, the demon possessed cursing and foaming at the mouth, a woman crying and wiping His feet with her hair, Gentiles and Jews, thousands of sinners pressed against Jesus, falling at His feet, reaching for His clothing, holding out their babies for Him to bless, crying out for Him. Would that we were so desperate for His salvation! Yet, we would've distanced ourselves from such a crowd. But Christ did not separate Himself from them. He healed them, blessed them, forgave their sins, and took all their afflictions and infirmities into

Himself. In doing so, our holy, eternal God was containing the disease of the world's sin in His own human flesh.

But the only way to cure our disease was for the Great Physician to die. Having contained our curse in His body, our innocent Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself over to the cross. Christ didn't downplay the deadliness of our sins; He became a mortal human being, suffered mocking, beatings, and crown of thorns; He was nailed to the cross and poured out His blood for our sins. For those coronavirus patients who this day are dying alone, without their families and pastor, gasping for air, our Lord Jesus Christ hung from the cross, gasping for air, abandoned by His disciples and even His heavenly Father, in order to conquer and destroy their disease. Christ not only, therefore, knows your sufferings, but is able to cure them. Christ was abandoned by the Father so that the Father would draw near to the abandoned. God's wrath for our sin was satisfied so that the sick and all sinners, no matter how isolated they feel, would be reconciled to God and have Him near to them in their suffering to strengthen, comfort, and save them. And having risen from the dead and ascended to the Father, Christ reigns in heaven so that the healing medicine of His cross would continually pour out for you.

What if we had a cure for coronavirus? One pill or one injection and you would walk out of the hospital, no matter what your age or how severe your symptoms, completely healthy. Can you imagine what people would do for that medicine? They would flood the labs and pharmacies and wait in lines for hours or even days. They would pay large sums of money. Countries would spend trillions of dollars to have it.

We have the cure for sin and death and salvation from hell as a free gift. And Christ has proven its effectiveness by rising from the dead. Let us not isolate ourselves from God or oppose Him, but, with repentant hearts, run to Christ and embrace Him who is our Savior. We cannot contain, cure, or conquer sin by being a good person. No one is righteous when judged by our perfect, holy God. But Jesus Christ can and does help us. He has handed the cure down to His holy Christian Church, saying to the disciples, "Receive the Holy Spirit, if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them," John 20:22-23. Christ graciously and generously draws near to us and applies the healing balm of His Word and Sacraments. As it says in Titus 3:3-7, "We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior." How much our lives are changed completely by the saving power of Jesus Christ! In baptism, Christ destroys the deadly power of any sickness or sin. All who believe and are baptized are changed and empowered by the Holy Spirit to live a new life of faith toward God and love toward their neighbor. Their lives are patterned after the life of Jesus Christ, who is victorious over sin and death and the devil. Therefore, they cannot be separated from God, since Christ is with the Father and Holy Spirit, one God, and they cannot die, since Christ is risen and cannot die! Yes, the body is buried temporarily, but it will be raised again when Christ returns. And the soul meanwhile, lives with Christ.

I hope this pandemic has not only helped us take seriously our sinful condition and to repent, but has given us a new appreciation and desire for Christ's gifts. We often have under-appreciated the Church. Many have made all kinds of excuses not to go to the Divine Service and have prioritized everything else above God's Word. We have groaned about getting up for church or our minds have wandered while receiving Holy Communion. We have tuned out sermons and mouthed the words of our hymns without any thought about them. Now that we've had time away and have lacked the Sacrament and our gathering around Christ's gifts, we realize how precious they were, and the peace and joy and strength that we received. So, when it is safe again to gather, let us run to our Christian congregations to happily hear His Word and receive the medicine of immortality in the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and rejoice with songs of praise.

May these words be your healing, strength, peace, and salvation during this pandemic. Our lives have changed drastically, but Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. God does not make light of our sufferings and needs. He fills us with good things for this daily life; He forgives sin, heals the sick, raises the dead, and gives eternal life through His Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding be yours in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.