

Dear Emo CRC,

I pray that this coming Sunday morning we may all take the time to consider that what we are seeing in our world today is nothing that God did not already know about and that God is in control. COVID 19 did not surprise God. When the people of Israel were overwhelmed by the Assyrian army they were surprised and shocked but God was not. Isaiah 14:25-27 tells us

The Lord Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will happen. I will crush the Assyrian in my land; on my mountains I will trample him down. His yoke will be taken from my people, and his burden removed from their shoulders." This is the plan determined for the whole world; this is the hand stretched out over all nations. For the Lord Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?

He knows all about COVID 19 and has a plan for it as well as for us. David too knew about the tension between faith in God and feeling the angst uncertainty. In Psalm 40 he wrote,

*I waited patiently for the Lord;
he turned to me and heard my cry.
He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire;
he set my feet on a rock
and gave me a firm place to stand.
He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear the Lord
and put their trust in him.
Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord,
who does not look to the proud,
to those who turn aside to false gods.
Many, Lord my God,
are the wonders you have done,
the things you planned for us.*

The COVID-19 pandemic has interrupted nearly every aspect of our lives. For some it will seem as an inconvenience, for others it's a threat to economic security, and still for others a very real threat to their physical health. To consider how it might negatively impact our lives is realistic but to ruminate on all the possible negative outcomes is like adding rocks to the day pack we must all carry on this hike we call life. Negative ruminating will eventually be back breaking.

How ever we experience this pandemic consider – the Preamble of the Contemporary Testimony of the CRCNA – OUR WORLD BELONGS TO GOD.

Preamble

- 1. As followers of Jesus Christ,
living in this world—
which some seek to control,
and others view with despair—
we declare with joy and trust:
Our world belongs to God!**

For God's ownership of all things, see Psalm 24:1 (quoted in 1 Cor. 10:26), Job 41:11, and Deuteronomy 10:14. That this is also "our world"—given to the human race to keep and care for—is one of the themes of the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2.

- 2. From the beginning,
through all the crises of our times,
until the kingdom fully comes,
God keeps covenant forever:
Our world belongs to God!
God is King: Let the earth be glad!
Christ is victor: his rule has begun!
The Spirit is at work: creation is renewed!
Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!**

For God's faithfulness, see, among many passages, Psalm 89, 117, 145; Romans 8:31-39; and Hebrews 10:23. For the victory of God in Christ and the rule of Christ, see 1 Corinthians 15:54-57, Philippians 2:9-11, and Revelation 1:13-18. For the Spirit's work renewing creation, see Genesis 1 and Romans 8.

- 3. Still, despair and rebellious pride fill the earth:
some, crushed by failure or broken by pain,
give up on life and hope and God;
others, shaken, but still hoping for human triumph,
work feverishly to realize their dreams.
As believers in God,
we also struggle with the spirits of this age,
resisting them in the power of the Spirit,
testing them by God's sure Word.**

Psalm 2 expresses the rebellious spirit of the human race. See also Romans 1-3. Ephesians 6:10-17 describes the struggle of believers with the spirits of the age. On testing the spirits, see 1 John 4.

**4. Our world, fallen into sin, has lost its first goodness,
but God has not abandoned the work of his hands:
our Maker preserves this world,
sending seasons, sun, and rain, upholding all creatures,
renewing the earth, promising a Savior,
guiding all things to their purpose.**

See Genesis 3; 9:8-16; Psalm 104, especially verse 30; Matthew 5:45; and Acts 14:17. For the promises of a Savior, see Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 7:14; 11:1-5; 42:1-7, 53; and Micah 5:2.

**5. God holds this world with fierce love.
Keeping his promise, he sends Jesus into the world,
pours out the Holy Spirit, and announces the good news:
sinners who repent and believe in Jesus
live anew as members of the family of God—
the first fruits of a new creation.**

For God's fierce love, see Hosea 11, especially verses 10-11. For statements of the gospel message, see John 3:1-21, Acts 2:36-39, Romans 10:7-11, and Ephesians 2:1-10. For "firstfruits," see Leviticus 23:9-14 and James 1:18.

**6. We rejoice in the goodness of God,
renounce the works of darkness,
and dedicate ourselves to holy living.
As covenant partners,
set free for joyful obedience,
we offer our hearts and lives
to do God's work in the world.
With tempered impatience,
eager to see injustice ended,
we expect the Day of the Lord.
We are confident that the light
which shines in the present darkness
will fill the earth when Christ appears.
Come, Lord Jesus.
Our world belongs to you.**

**12. Even now, as history unfolds
in ways we know only in part,
we are assured
that God is with us in our world,
holding all things in tender embrace
and bending them to his purpose.
The confidence that the Lord is faithful
gives meaning to our days
and hope to our years.
The future is secure,
for our world belongs to God.**

For the providential care of God, see Isaiah 45:6-7, Matthew 6:25-34, and Luke 12:4-7.

Remember too that most of our growth happens through pain, either the kind we choose - discipline, or the kind we do not choose - trial. Neither should be wasted. This pandemic is a trial of global proportions, and our faith in God calls us to not waste this moment. Many people come to faith during a time of crisis; when their illusion of control is shattered. Most of us think we can determine the outcomes of our lives. This is a myth best revealed when unexpected forces interfere with, or completely destroy our plans. It can also be a time to pause and consider those things that are truly important. We have this opportunity to be a calming presence, to evidence our faith in God and our belief that our world belongs to God and that he is still in control. It may well be an opportunity to share that faith and lead others to the throne room of our Lord.

Prayer

Father in Heaven we come to you because you are God, the one and only, Creator of heaven and earth. We come to you because there is no other who can help. We believe that even the researchers and medical professionals working on a vaccine are in your care and will only find what you show them. We pray that you will reveal to them the ins and outs of this virus and that they will be able to develop a vaccine that will put an end to the pandemic.

While we wait for you to answer that prayer we pray for wisdom and calm heart and minds. Help us to see all the opportunities for us to be the hands and feet of Christ for all our neighbors so that in all we do 'your Kingdom may come and your will be done here on earth just as it is in Heaven'. When we see the empty shelves in the grocery store remind us Lord that it is you who gives us our daily bread, you feed us, and care for every part of our lives.

When cabin fever leaves us feeling starved for social interaction enliven us to consider forgiving those who trespass against us Lord to restore relationship in the same way you have forgiven us and restored us to yourself.

When we are tempted Lord to ruminate on all the negatives feed us with every word that proceeds from your mouth and deliver us from the evil that COVID 19 threatens to spread to our bodies and our hearts and minds.

Guard us from the sort of pessimism that thrives in the garbage dump of 'stinking thinking' that Satan so loves and empower us to,

Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because we know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. (1 Pet.5:9)

Remind us again and again that it is you,

the God of all grace, who called us to your eternal glory in Christ, who has promised that after we have suffered a little while, you yourself will restore us and make us strong, firm and steadfast. (1 Pet.5:10)

We pray that you will give us a calm faith and your own creative genius so that we might make the best of this situation and truly be your image bearers.

To you be the power for ever and ever. (1 Pet.5:11)

Father we pray for all our students, your children in school from Kindergarten to university, guide them too Lord as they too are affected by this pandemic. We pray that they may soon return to learning about all the wonders of your creation and that you will continue to guide their education Lord that they may continue to grow as bearers of you image.

We pray Lord for your people here who suffer the effects of a fallen creation by way of all kinds of disease. We continue to ask for Cheryl and others of our loved ones Lord who must fight against cancer. We thank you, of course for the treatments that we have discovered and that we have access to them but we pray too Father that you would send a healing power to take that cancer from their bodies and restore them to their former health. We pray Lord that you would lead researchers to discover a cure as well and we ask for those awaiting tests and results who harbor fears and angst...grant them your amazing peace and simple answers and treatment's.

We think of Sid and Peter struggling with Parkinsons and Paul suffering with the after effects of a stroke. While we are thankful for the treatments we have so far we pray Lord for their healing and health as well and that cures for their conditions may yet be found in time for them. We ask for Ted too Lord. Bring a healing balm to his body and take shingles away in Jesus name. We think too of Cathy Stahn having to deal with Lupis Lord. We Pray that you will grant her healing and restoration as well. We pray that you especially keep COVID 19 from them Lord.

LORD you see how easily we can be effected and fast our lives can change just because of sickness and we have not even asked you for those dealing with mental health issues.

We need you, O, we need you, every hour we need we need you, O bless us now, dear Savior, we come to Thee.

We come to you Lord knowing full well that we cannot always fully dodge the effects of our broken world. We suffer with age related declining health issues as our minds slip and our bodies no longer do what we could do in our youth.

We confess Father that we are the ones who deface your image in us and that because of sin and our continuing rebellion the whole world suffers and if left to ourselves we would be completely estranged from you our Creator, and from our neighbor, and from our true selves, and from all that You have made. So we are all the more grateful that we are not our own but that we do belong to you in body and in soul and in life and in death. We thank you that you sent your Son Jesus and that he has fully paid for all our sins and set us free from the power of the devil. We thank you that you preserve us in such a way that not even a hair can fall from our heads without your will.

Though you call us your body we confess that we are a broken communion in a broken world. We marvel that you still gather broken people in a broken world to do your work and that you bless us still with new and surprising evidences of unity. Help us to step into every opportunity our current situation might present us with. Forgive us Lord for leaving your work to the few.

Guide and embolden us we pray to care for the hungry and thirsty and naked and sick and the imprisoned and all those impacted by COVID 19. Help us to demonstrate true reverence for all of creation and give us the power and wisdom we need to protest and resist all that harms, abuses, or diminishes your gift of life that we may be grace filled witnesses of your image in us and the rest of humanity in Jesus Name Amen.

May the Lord Bless you and keep.

May he cause his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.

May he turn his face towards you and grant you his peace.

Blessings in Christ,
Pastor Kasey VanderVeen.

p.s. If you'd like to chat, call me at 1 204 396-6332