

03 Think on This.
For March 29, 2020

This is the second Sunday that we are not able to gather for worship because of Covid 19. Besides our health some of us have fears and angst regarding Covid's impact on our economy and our fiscal futures. I have questions about that too. I may feel the effects of this pandemic well into my retirement. People are looking for answers all over the place and right now Christian websites are all abuzz with talk of this pandemic. Some are trying to give clarity on "end times" passages in an effort to offer encouragement. Some calling for calm heads because its not the end and some calling for calm because this is 'definitely' a sign. When Jesus spoke of the 'signs' in Luke 21 he say this, 25 "*There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars.*

On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. 26 People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. 27 At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

I see and hear about angst and apprehension about what is going to happen but I do not see signs of 'heavenly bodies' being shaken. Also many of the signs that Jesus spoke of have been around for thousands of years. Human history is full of devastating storms, the terrors of war and mass pandemics not to mention ethnic cleansings and genocides. Many times in the history of humanity people have wondered if 'the end' was right around the corner. James writes, "*Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."*

This is a wonderful truth that we often neglect. *We do not even know what will happen tomorrow* and that's when there is no threat to undo us. In good and bad times we are to be thinking on what the Lord's will is and to busy ourselves with that and we know what that is. Micah 6:8 tells us it is, "*to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God*". If you are unsure about what that should look like, Jesus tells us, "*Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.*"

So that is and always has been the Lord's will for us. In fact Jesus says that this has been so 'since the creation of the world'. This was God's design all along. At Mt. Sinai God told Moses to remind the people, "*You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*"

He has carried us on eagle's wings as well. He brought us to himself and we – all of us – are his treasured possession. His promise is that it is He that delivers us in times of need and that it is He that upholds us in times of blessing as well. Whatever the case **we are** his kingdom of priests called to bless those in need. It is the confidence gleaned from their past experiences with God, including instances of deliverance that gave rise to Psalm 91.

Psalm 91

- 1 Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.*
- 2 I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."*
- 3 Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare
and from the deadly pestilence.*
- 4 He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.*
- 5 You will not fear the terror of night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,*
- 6 nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,
nor the plague that destroys at midday.*
- 7 A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.*
- 8 You will only observe with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.*
- 9 If you say, "The Lord is my refuge,"
and you make the Most High your dwelling,*
- 10 no harm will overtake you,
no disaster will come near your tent.*
- 11 For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways;*
- 12 they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.*
- 13 You will tread on the lion and the cobra;
you will trample the great lion and the serpent.*
- 14 "Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him;
I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.
He will call on me, and I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.*
- 15 With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation."*

In times like these most folks want to focus on words and phrases like, ‘no disaster will come near his tent’ or ‘I will rescue him’ or ‘I will deliver him’ or ‘with long life I will satisfy him’ and they interpret those words for this life and their present trouble. While some did experience deliverance from troubles in this life many did not. The apostles all died for the faith. Many wonderful believers became fatalities in wars, previous pandemics and devastating storms. In speaking of the end times Jesus tells us in Luke 21, “... *they will put some of you to death..... But not a hair of your head will perish.*” Did you catch that? We may die but not a hair on our heads will perish. According to God our safety and security is not found here. It is found with him.

Perhaps it would be more instructive for us to focus on verses 11-13. Don’t they sound familiar? They are the words Satan uses to tempt Jesus in the wilderness during Jesus time of isolation and hardship. The lion and the serpent of verse 13 is Satan. It is Peter who reminds us of this when he writes, “*Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.*” (1 Pet.5:8).

Of course Jesus did not strike his foot against a stone. Instead he crushed the serpents head with his heel. Once again it is His faithfulness that is our “shield and rampart” and it is He who will cover us with His feathers so that we may find refuge under his wings. This pandemic is in his hands.

Prayer

<https://sydneyanglicans.net/covid19prayers>

Heavenly Father, I praise you as the sovereign Lord of the universe. I praise you that, to you, the nations of the world are like a drop in a bucket and like the dust on the scales. I am so thankful to know that you own the cattle on a thousand hills, and that nothing is too hard for you. I thank you that you care for me—that you number even the hairs of my head, and that all the days ordained for me were written in your book before any of them happened. I thank you that you can be trusted. And I do trust you. Help me to trust you more.

Thank you that the coronavirus, and all the frightening circumstances popping up around it, are not frightening to you. Thank you that you know everything there is to know about this virus.

Thank you for this desperately needed reminder that we need you. Lord, I confess that I spend so much time thinking and acting as if I were self-sufficient. Forgive me. Help me to remember that I depend on you for everything I need, whether I feel healthy or sick, whether the global economy is healthy or sick. Use this time to teach me to trust you more during good times and bad.

Father, please pour out your common grace on our world to halt this virus in its tracks. All things are possible for you, Father. And so I ask for healing for a sick world. Please heal those who are already ill. Please prevent the elderly and others who are especially vulnerable to this virus. Please intervene to slow the spread of this virus in countries all over the globe.

Please give wisdom, insight and knowledge to scientists and researchers as they search for the most effective treatments and for a vaccine. Please provide for a vaccine to be quickly discovered, tested, developed, and made available. Please give wisdom to all rulers and officials who are making vital decisions and who are under such enormous pressure. Guide their hand so they make decisions based on both truth and love.

Please withhold power and influence from anyone who would use this time for selfish gain of any kind.

Please be with church leaders making big decisions that will affect so many of your people and their fellowship together. Please give them wisdom on how to best listen to governing authorities and to respect the directions that are given, while still caring for one another and prioritizing the need to encourage one another as we see the day of Christ drawing near. Wherever regular gatherings are interrupted, please provide ways for your people to stay connected to one another, and please strengthen us to care for one another in creative and genuine ways. Please be especially gracious to those who are already lonely and who may feel particularly isolated during the weeks ahead.

Loving heavenly Father, at a time of great need, please pour out your saving grace on our world and bring people into your kingdom in an extraordinary way.

Please use this virus, and all the circumstances surrounding it, to bring people to their knees. Turn people's hearts and minds back to you in repentance and faith. Enable us all to see that, for too long, we've based our life on shifting sand. Bring people all over the world – whether for the first time, or in a fresh way – to turn to the Lord Jesus as their Rock, and to put their hope and trust in him.

Thank you that, no matter where we have wandered or how long we've run from you, you are always ready to welcome us back through Jesus and what he's done for us.

Please help me to be strong and courageous, not afraid or discouraged, because you are near. Help me not to be anxious, but to present all my requests to you in prayer. As I do that, may your peace guard my heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

At a time where it feels like the whole world is changing, I praise you, Father – for you never change. I praise you, Lord Jesus, for you are the same yesterday, today and forever.

This Hymn was written in 1830 by Ray Palmer and used by many soldiers and faith communities during the U.S. civil war. There were an estimated 1.5 million casualties reported during the Civil War. Those casualties came by death, wounds, injury, sickness, and internment, For every three soldiers killed in battle, five more died of disease.

1 My faith looks up to Thee,
Thou Lamb of Calvary,
Savior divine!
Now hear me while I pray,
take all my guilt away;
O let me from this day
be wholly Thine.

2 May Thy rich grace impart
strength to my fainting heart,
my zeal inspire;
as Thou hast died for me,
O may my love to Thee
pure, warm, and changeless be,
a living fire.

3 While life's dark maze I tread,
and griefs around me spread,
be Thou my guide;
bid darkness turn to day,
wipe sorrow's tears away,
nor let me ever stray
from Thee aside.

4 When ends life's transient dream,
when death's cold, sullen stream
shall o'er me roll,
blest Savior, then in love,
fear and distrust remove;
O bear me safe above,
a ransomed soul.

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.