

“Let Me Kiss Thy Hand!”
 Sermon for 15 March 2020 “A National Day of Prayer”
 Texts: Genesis 21:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:50-54

“Hast thou no word from the Lord for us, O man of God?” No word on this day of prayer? On this day of prayer declared to be such by our President? On this call to prayer? Yes, I do and it is this: Fear Not.

Fear not. The news of our mortality is so familiar as not to be news at all. We all shall die. Sooner or later, from our point of view . . . never either from our Lord’s point of view. What seems premature to us is neither soon, nor late to our God who has appointed our day of death. **Lord, do you not care that we perish?** So the freighted crew of disciples cries under the lethal threat of storm, wind and wave on the Sea of Galilee. Are we to become like them? Imperiled by the pandemic that has seized this world of ours? Fear not. As surely as we shall die and no less certainly our Lord has made preparation—long before this terror, the terrorism by disease, ever came upon us, our Lord came and set things right. Those who trust in Jesus shall never ever vanish from his sight. Our departures, soon or late, are never as final as those departures that come to anyone who knows not Him. That is the difference that faith makes. We fear not because Christ has died and risen. Our hope is the hope of the resurrection. We are not to fear as those who have no hope.

As you may remember, thrice have I come near to death in my tenure here. Yes, I who have officiated at many funerals, I am no less mortal than those I eulogized, or laid to rest. It is not news that we shall die. It is only when. But I am not afraid because he has taken hold of me. His hold on the destiny of my soul exceeds my death. I, when I pass, shall not mourn my passing. I will depart from here and enter there, into realms everlasting with my Lord. Christ has secured my future and that deliverance both redeems my past, and steadies me for the present. Forgiveness of sins and the securing of heaven, yes, both at once attained.

By faith we face the shuttering of our nation. This pandemic lacks finality with us. We will not give in to panic. Those *who believe* can truly say in God they’ve put their trust. **God is our rock, our refuge and strength. This virus is real.** There will be deaths from its contagion. But, fear not. Take precautions. Be wise. But do not give in to desperation. **Your daughter, if you believe, is not dead; she but sleeps (Mark 5) . . . our friend, Lazarus, has fallen asleep, I go to raise him up to the glory of God!** (John 11) These words, recorded in Scripture, should be inscribed on our hearts; they were uttered for our comfort as well as for the consolation of those whose loved ones had died. Christ is more the Lord of life, he has power over death. More to be worshipped is the One who raises the dead than the Devil who slays us. Fear God, friends, and nothing else can terrify you.

Our God is not like paper products on the shelves of your grocery store. His strength for you is not rationed, never in short supply . . . it never depletes. And, it cannot be hoarded. Your cart is not empty because others got there first. Scarcities remind us of how limited this world actually is. Distribution is always a factor. A shortage of toilet tissue is inconvenient, but not fatal. We can improvise. We will make do. The way to cope with selfish stocking is to keep the faith and wait it out. Perhaps consumables will return, perhaps not. We can only control our response to the behavior of others. By faith we can

show restraint, calm, peace in the face of want, scarcity and need. Fear not. Desperation is not the only option open to us . . . nor panic.

We have prayer. And, Lord, we do pray. We pray for health care providers and for our facilities—hospitals, healthcare centers, emergency care outlets, rehabilitation places, and for our homes. Assist us Lord in the preparation and protection of our homes. Keep down the rates of contagion; keep up your heart of mercy and compassion. Protect us as we cope with those who are sickened, those who are stricken. Help us provide appropriate space where we live. We pray for the young and the elderly . . . the homeless and the displaced. We pray for ourselves and for the strangers in our midst as you have bidden us in your word. Let us not barricade ourselves behind our fears, nor let us so capitulate to this contagion that we forget that people die from diverse causes—our care for those at risk must not be so discriminating, so focused on this plague that we grow callous and inflexible. Protect us from quacks and from deceivers, those who would take advantage of the frightened and particularly those at risk.

Those who are afraid need the beacon of our fearless faith. They need Christ above all. He is our safety net, our security, our protection. We pray for relief, we pray for a vaccine, Lord; if you would work relief through medicine, please do so. Not so much for us, but more for those who do not believe. We pray for opportunity to pray with others—especially those just named. Let us harness this crisis for Your use, Lord. May many come to faith who apart from this alarm and shaking would have put off seeking their salvation. Save those who have yet to hear your name. And may the world's loss be heaven's gain. May the focus on now meld into a focus on what lasts, what persists forever. To assist this end, we ask that grace abound and the gift of saving faith be poured out. Secure lost souls to Yourself. Serve God and do not be afraid.

Prayer: May those who come to You out of this dark hour prove genuine believers . . . not sometime, sunshine converts who mistake this disease for the wrath to come upon all the unrepentant. It is to save your soul, not your skin that we pray for your conversion. We pray that many would turn to God for Himself and not for rescue, not just to alleviate their suffering and their sweat. Lord, we intercede for those who sicken and recover. Set their feet in a sure path. Give them joy and thanksgiving. May they, having partaken of Your mercy, prove the most merciful and kind among us. Howsoever they were immunized against this disease release them particularly to minister to others. May they join ranks with those secured by faith and together tend the suffering. Make our need a better occasion for love and teach us how to love each other. Amen

The world says shut down, quarantine. Jesus says, "Only believe." To which will you harken? And, when Gloucester, asks, "Let me kiss thy hand." King Lear's response, "Let me wipe it first. It smells of mortality." In case you have missed this fact, we do all smell the same. All of us, smell mortal. All of us are bound to die. But, fear not, Christ is risen. He went before and rose from the dead. Death is not the end for those who believe, glory lies ahead. What abides exceeds what remains. Burial is necessary, but temporary; not the last word. **For the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible . . . we shall all be changed, in an instant, in the twinkling of the eye.** Have any invested in futures? Well, then, there's a future here to invest in. There's work to do: serve God, bless others. Reach out to those who are Elect.

(Citing from C.H. Spurgeon, Sermon 974, 1871.) Quote: "The Holy Ghost leads us to pray for those whom He intends effectually to call.

Moreover, those we pray for, we may not know it, but there may be in their souls at this time a stirring of divine life. Hagar did not know that her son was praying, but God did. The lad did not speak, but God heard his heart cry. Children are often very reticent to their parents. Often I have talked with young lads about their souls, who have told me that they could not talk to their fathers upon such matters. I know it was so with me. When I was under concern of soul the last persons I should have elected to speak to upon religion would have been my parents, not out of want of love to them, nor absence of love on their part; but so it was. A strange feeling of diffidence pervades a seeking soul, and drives it from its friends. Those whom you are praying for may be praying too, and you do not know it; but the time of love will come when their secret yearnings will be revealed to your earnest endeavors.

The lad was preserved after all, the well of waters was revealed, and the bottle put to his lips. It will be a great comfort to you to believe that God will hear importunate prayers. Your child will be saved, your husband will be brought in yet, good woman, only pray on. Your neighbor shall be brought to hear the truth and be converted, only be earnest about it.

I do not know how to preach, this morning; the tongue cannot readily speak when the heart feels too much. I pray that we may have a great revival of religion in our midst as a church; my spirit longs and pants for it. I see a great engine of enormous strength, and a well-fashioned machine: the machine cannot work of itself, it has no power in it, but if I could get the band to unite the machine with the engine, what might be done!

Behold, I see the omnipotence of God, and the organization of this church. O that I could get the band to bind the two together! The band is living faith. Do you possess it? Brethren, help me to pass it round the flywheel, and oh, how God will work, and we will work through His power, and what glorious things shall be done for Christ! We must receive power from on high, and faith is the belt that shall convey that power to us. The divine strength shall be manifest through our weakness. Cease not to pray. More than you ever have done, intercede for a blessing, and the Lord will bless us: He will bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear him." End quote.

Then He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them. Now about the fourth watch of the night, He came to them, walking on the sea, and would have passed them by. And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost and cried out; for they all saw Him and were troubled. But immediately He talked with them and said to them, "Be of good cheer! It is I do not be afraid."

He comes to us in crisis because He is who He says He is. Come, Lord Jesus

Amen