

August 22, 2021 What Are We To Make Of All This? Pt. 4
Psalm 90:11-12

Dearly Beloved;

Two things are clear at this point in time. A 4th wave of Covid-19 is here. It is also clear that the majority of those who are being infected at this point are among the number of those who have not been vaccinated. As governments, corporations, and businesses insist their employees get vaccinated or undergo a regimen of continuous testing, the situation may improve to the point that we will not need to be concerned.

We also know the Delta virus (a variant) is driving this 4th wave. The concern of concerns is that an even more infectious variant will emerge as a result of the spread of illness. The drill of hand washing, hand sanitizing, masking, and avoiding gatherings where you cannot be sure everyone is taking precautions, are more necessary than ever. And the primary reason we are not singing at this point is precisely that. I am insisting we be cautious.

Two weeks ago, I expressed the possibility of singing returning to our worship practice in the Fall. I noted this past week, that the Toronto School Board is going to be including singing in the schools in the Fall. I have seen no explanation of that decision, nor have I heard anything from our denominational counsellors. I am considering a number of options. In my opinion we are getting closer to the ability to sing rather than hum, with masks, and probably a muted singing. I do not see us returning to choir soon simply because

of the added risks of standing together, to sing. I would also remind all of us that in its origin, the choir was the congregation singing God's praise. We are still in a vulnerable and evolving situation.

If you have not known, Ron Davidson lost his brother Wayne, about two weeks ago. Wayne was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer and lost that battle. I knew Wayne before I met Ron actually. In September I will be conducting a service at the graveside at White Lake Cemetery. I have made this announcement so that you may express your condolences to Ron and his family. Let us turn to the word for the day from Psalm 90.

WHAT ARE WE TO MAKE OF ALL THIS? Pt. 4

I have suggested that part of what we are experiencing in this Covid-19 Pandemic is the judgement of God. I have never made such a statement before in 53 years of ministry. I and you, have never experienced anything like this Covid-19 Pandemic. And in spite of the fact that we have lived through a time when wars continued to rage around the world, the truth is we have lived most of our lives in relative peace. The action, if one can call war that, has continually erupted over there, and way over there. While we have seen the destruction on television, and heard about it in the newscasts, we have not lived in the midst of these catastrophes. The Pandemic swept around the world, carried by people who were travelling and some of them, in a moment when we did not understand what we now know, that the virus spreads like

wildfire. We have watched as people have died. We have heard the cries of the mourners who could not even gather to grieve. We have experienced the lockdowns. And we have been reduced to ancient practices to stay safe...that is what social distancing is: an ancient practice to stay safe from infectious disease.

I never asked the question, why do the sick and the leprous, shout to Jesus, to have mercy on them before the arrival of Covid-19. It is because the ancients understood this about disease, which they did not fully understand: the safest practice was to isolate the sick, and keep distance from them. Leper colonies are the prime example of a society's strategy to control infection, in a time and a place where there was no vaccine.

And then there is the question, why is God angry? People are sorely tempted to ask that question based on a conviction that "we didn't do anything! We are innocent". The truth, and there is even a denial in these times that there is such a thing as truth...the truth is we are not innocent. The Scriptures tell us over and over again that the fact is we are guilty. All of us, me too, are guilty of sin. Sin carelessly ignores the love, the grace and the power of God. HE created us, and this beautiful world in which we live, because HE wanted a relationship with us. Our world has tried to live without God with a vengeance. And here we are. Here we are.

Verse 7 of Psalm 90 says “we are consumed by YOUR anger,” (the anger of God). And verse 11 asks the key question. “Who knows the power of YOUR anger?” Here is a truth seldom sought, and often ignored. We, the people of the earth, only begin to understand the power of God’s anger when we are in the midst of the storm of HIS judgement. The Pharaoh of Egypt pursued the children of Israel with the one desire of destroying them from the face of the earth. He did not believe in the God of Moses, or the power of the judgement of the God of Moses, until the waters which had divided, to give them a road to freedom, suddenly closed and swept the greatest war machine of that age away.

Who knows the power of God’s anger?

Those who are in the midst of the storm of judgement. I have said this before and I say it again. I am not saying these things to make you afraid of God, or to make you surrender your rights to the church as an organization. You are still here. You have not been sick. You have followed the ancient wisdom. You have stayed home. You have worn and are wearing your mask. You assemble for worship when it is safe to do so. You care about the things of God. You practice your faith in HIM. And unless you do something really foolish, you are under the protection of HIS everlasting arms. Jesus loves you. The Holy Spirit is with you and in you.

Verse 11 goes on to say, “Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due YOU.” The phrase, “fear of God,” means faith. God’s wrath is as powerful as is the faith to which

HE has called us. When the Hebrews daubed their door posts with the blood of a lamb, they were expressing their faith in the God who delivered them from the waters of the Sea and the chariots of the Egyptians. That you believe in Jesus, the lamb of God, to the degree you believe, and Jesus insisted that a little faith, a small amount, was enough to move mountains, that you believe is significant and important in a time such as this is.

The wrath of God is HIS rightful reaction-response to the ignoring of God which we see as a rampant trend in our time and in the cultures of the world. And faith is the vaccine that saves us from the wrath of God. Does that mean you or I, are not going to die? Never? Of course not. We are mortal. And the simple truth is our time is not something we get to choose. My medical problems have reminded me several times that as my friend Wayne Davidson said to me, "it is what it is, I can't do anything about that." At least 5 times in my life I have been aware there was a thread's distance between my being here and being gone. The important thing is to realize and respect and accept the fact that we are in the hands of God who loves us. Not because we are good or superior in any way to others, but because we believe HIM. Because we know HE is.

Verse 12 says, "Teach us to number our days aright." In the King James Version that is translated word for word... "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." What's that all about? Here is what I believe that means. Teach us to value our time, each day, each

hour, each minute, that we might have the emotional response of the wise, recognizing YOU are the God who is, who sent Jesus into the world to redeem it and us, and that we might appreciate the depth of YOUR love and YOUR grace toward us...especially in times like these, when the waters of death have not been able to claim us.

And part of our wisdom through faith is a sensitivity that we need to always be asking for forgiveness. That is what repentance is about. In our relationship with God we recognize our need to be forgiven. In our recognition of the cross of Jesus on Calvary's hill, we need, I need, to continually ask for the forgiveness of sins I have committed in carelessness and ignorance. That is part of "numbering our days aright that we may gain a heart that is wise," meaning characterized by faith. So, let us pray.

Holy God, Jesus our Saviour, Holy Spirit who leads us and guides us, and gives us the comfort of the assurance of your love, forgive us our sins. Touch our world with the reality of your saving grace. Shorten this time of world wide pandemic, we pray. Cause us to be safe in the midst of the infectious virus. Grant us immunity that comes from your throne. Open our eyes to the needs of others. Refashion our spirits that we might become humble servants, and good neighbours, especially to people who are different from ourselves. Teach us anew the wisdom of faith in YOU. Amen