

August 29, 2021 What Are We To Make Of All Of This? Pt. 5
Psalm 90:13-17

Dearly Beloved;

The numbers for our area continue to be relatively low. However, I cannot stress enough that these are dangerous times. This 4th Wave of Covid-19 is being driven by a much more infectious variant of the virus. It is clear that even vaccinated persons can be infected. What that means is that we have to be careful. Here, so far as I know, we are for the most part among vaccinated people who are trying to be as careful as ourselves. Wear your mask in doors when involved in group activities. Remember to put space between yourself and others. Use the hand sanitizer, and wash your hands carefully.

I know we want this to be pandemic to be over. Realistically, there are going to be pop-ups of cases for months to come. The ancient strategy of self-isolating, distancing ourselves from others, is the only safe way forward. We must pursue it. I thank you for your patience, in a time when most of us do not want to be patient. Let us turn to worship and the word.

What Are We To Make OF All Of This? Pt. 5

In our society there is an impatience that this pandemic be over. People generally just want to get back to doing things and living as we did before Covid-19 came among us. The church is not immune from these frustrations, and desires. When I say, this is the judgement of God, I am saying

that which is clearly true. We are not in control of what is happening. As people characterized by faith, we have long said, God is, and HIS is the power and the glory. In moments of great faith, we acknowledge that God and not we, is in control of what is happening, and the length of time, the discomfort lasts. In moments when we are simply hurting and frustrated, we complain, we say unkind things, we are tempted to act rashly. And all of us feel the pressure, and experience the irritation. I may appear calm. The fact is I want to quit. Not because anyone has been bad, or rude, or even critical. I am frustrated. And I feel like, I do not have answers. It is not just us. Or me. I have heard from colleagues across the church. And across denominational lines. We are a people in pain.

Verse 13 of Psalm 90 verbalizes what we are thinking. "Relent, O Lord! How long will it be?" And you will notice there is no clap of thunder, no resounding clear answer. The note, in the scrolls, say this is the prayer of Moses when he was leading the people out of Egypt and across the wilderness. The note says he is praying for the knowledge and the experience of God's good providence. What does that mean? It means that he is praying to God, asking for a sign that he might know and be certain, that God is in control of what is unfolding in real time, real life, all around him.

You would think that having witnessed the parting of the waters, that provided an escape route from the Egyptians, having witnessed the waters crashing back into place, sweeping the Egyptian army away, it would be easy for Moses to believe,

God is in control. But it is not. For every miracle of God's grace that we experience, there is a new challenge, and a new eruption of the question, what now? Which is to say, that every time we relax in the power of what faith in God can do and see, there is a new challenge, that requires more faith than we had before. "Relent, O Lord! How long will it be?" The Oxford dictionary defines relent as meaning "relax the severity, become less stern, abandon the harsh intention." And even I understand that the question "How long will it be?" means, I can't handle much more of this. In faith terms, I believe, but I need this to be over.

I chose Psalm 90 for this series not because it is easy, it is not. It is where we are and we are feeling what Moses felt, what David felt, that sense, that we are at the breaking point. The Psalm continues, "Have compassion on your servants. Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we might sing for joy, and be glad all our days." This is the encouraging part of Psalm 90. It is okay to call on God to bring an end to the trials of this time. It is okay to want it to be over. It is okay to want to be able to sing as we sang, in times gone by. It is okay to want to be full of the flush of the joy of God's presence, to not have to mask and sit spaced apart, not hugging, not touching, not shaking hands. This too is part of the journey of faithfulness. To want the hard times to be over.

It has been 18 months. And it feels like it has been forever. And the conflicted feelings. I want to say we have lost so much, and yet we have been able to eat, we have had

shelter, we haven't been sick or hospitalized with this virus that has killed so many. But we have been cut off from so many things...the fellowship over food, the laughter. It feels like we have been living in a tense, what's going to happen next universe day after day...because we have. I heard a commentator on radio saying "I never want to hear the phrase socially-isolate again. But it is not over. Not yet."

You are not being unfaithful if you pray that it be over. You are not being unfaithful if in your prayers you tell your Lord and Saviour, you want relief from the restrictions. You are not being weak, to ask for good times that last at least as long as the bad times, the trying times, have been. That is what Moses prayed for. That is what David wrote in this Psalm based on what he understood Moses went through in his hard time. "Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us."

What have we learned in the last 16 months? We have certainly learned how important it is to us, to be able to sing "How Great Thou Art" or "Jesus loves me this I know." Or "He is Lord, HE is Lord, He is risen from the dead and HE is Lord!" And we have learned that sitting together and breaking bread together, is not just food and drink. It is the being together without worrying about the potential consequences of being elbow to elbow, seeing the smile on the lips of the person across from you, laughing together without feeling, it's dangerous.

We have learned we need such times together. More than we ever would have thought. We need to be able to weep together in our grief. To hold on to one another when there has been a loss in our family. We need to be able to gather in close...a holy huddle...because we need to gather in close with our loved ones and our friends.

Verse 16: “May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children.” Yes, we want to be able to rejoice at the reality of miracles poured out into our midst, to share the witnessing to God among us, that Jesus saves, that Jesus gives new life and love that is impossible without HIS presence in the midst. We want our children to recognize how important these things are to us.

Verse 17: “May the favour of the Lord rest upon us.” Yes that is what we want to experience. To be so filled with joy, the tears run down our cheeks. To be able to say when we get ourselves back together, after hysterical laughter, “God is so good.” Remember that chorus. God is so good to me. He answers prayer, hallelujah. He answers prayer. Hallelujah. He’s so good to me.” We used to sing that. We want to sing it again.

And we don’t just want to continue to exist, as an organization, as a social group, or even as individuals. We want to see that God is blessing what we are doing together. That’s where the real joy of being the church comes from...the visibility of God’s blessing the work we do. It making a difference in someone else’s life...even as far away as Kenya, or

in a native settlement in the north in the midst of the icy chill of winter. That is what is meant by that repeated line, “establish the work of our hands for us...” By the means of YOUR HOLY Spirit, make it real for us, and real for the people whose lives we affect.

This pandemic has been a hard journey. For us. For the church. For the community around us, and the world. And it is not over.... So...let us pray.

Lord, Sovereign, Saving, Present-with-us-God, end this time of illness, isolation and fear. End this time of uncertainty. End this time in which we cannot safely sing together. Strengthen our faith we pray for the days that remain. Renew our joy as we taste your presence among us. Grant us the peace of resting in your will. Touch us with your redeeming love. Open our eyes to the signs of your presence. Heal us, our hearts, our minds, our souls, our bodies. Lead us in the way of Jesus, we ask. Amen