

Lent 2A, 2020
Genesis 12:1-4

FINDING OUR WAY THROUGH THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

Pastor Erik here, sending grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Creator, from Jesus the Christ, and from the Holy Spirit, who holds us in community even when we're unable to be physically together in one place.

We are living through an extraordinary time right now, as our region and the world grapple with the spreading coronavirus—COVID-19. It's a time of high anxiety with many unknowns.

In conformity with recommendations made by the Health Department, we have cancelled our education classes and worship service for, Sunday, March 8th, as well as our Wednesday evening meal and prayer service on March 11th.

As Christians and responsible citizens we are bound to do everything we can to support efforts by the medical community and government officials to halt the spread of the virus.

I want you to know that I, along with our church council leaders, will continue to monitor Health Department recommendations throughout the coming week. You can expect to receive further communications about Sunday and Wednesday services by way of email and the Peace Website as the week goes on.

Since we cannot be together this morning in worship, I wanted to share some encouragement with you today by reflecting on this moment through the LENS that the Scriptures and our faith provide. So, dearly beloved, here's my homily for today.

This is the 2nd Sunday in Lent, and our first appointed reading, from Genesis 12, is quite fitting for our circumstances. It reads:

The Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." So Abram went, as the Lord had told him.

The Word of the Lord, Thanks be to God.

The 12th chapter of Genesis reveals a CROSSROADS in the story of God's plan to heal the world.

Scripture tells us that God's earlier ventures with the human creature were not the unqualified successes we might have expected. After the creation accounts, the ancient stories of Genesis in chapters 3-11 tell the tragic tale of human disobedience, mistrust, hubris, and violence.

By chapter 11 God's mistake-prone creatures seems to have reached the end of their story. For as we meet Abram and his wife Sarai for the very first time, we learn that they have no child; that they, in fact, are incapable of having children. And with this news everything seems bound to come to a halt. For there seems to be no way, through human capacity, to move the story forward.

But then, into this bleak landscape, God breathes a word of promise and new beginning.

The LORD told Abram, GO FROM YOUR COUNTRY & KINDRED & FATHER'S HOUSE AND I WILL MAKE YOU A NATION, AND YOU WILL BE A BLESSING. And Abram went.

God says, in effect, “this story isn’t over yet.”

God initiates. God commands. God promises. God blesses. God casts a vision of possibilities and new life where there seems to be only impossibility and barrenness.

And Abram chooses to believe God. He follows God’s command... he goes.

Now Abram and Sarai had no idea where this journey would lead them or how exactly God’s promises to them would be fulfilled. In their time, the notion that something out in front of them—a future—could be different from the past, was radically new.

But despite of not knowing, they said YES. They put their trust in this VOICE which had spoken to them, and began putting one foot in front of the other.

The time we’re living through right now is an Abram and Sarai moment.

The coronavirus continues to spread through communities and countries around the world, and we have no idea how this will end.

But like Abram and Sarai, we are being called to trust the promise that God is with us; to trust that a future with blessing is still in front of us; to trust that we can contribute to God’s work by doing our part to keep our households and communities safe and to support the good work of the medical community to halt the virus and restore health and safety so we can resume our lives once again.

A story from the life of Martin Luther also has something to teach us about how we apply ourselves to this current situation.

The bubonic plague or “black death” devastated Europe in recurring cycles beginning in the mid-14th century. In its first wave close to half of Europe’s population died.

200 years later the plague returned.

Understandably, people were anxious and wondered what a safe and faithful response might be. In answer to this, Martin Luther wrote the essay: “Whether One May Flee From a Deadly Plague.”¹

In his essay Luther spoke of our duty to care for the neighbor, the responsibility of government to protect and provide services to its citizens, and the importance of science, medicine and common sense.

To provide care for the neighbor, Luther recommended that pastors, people who held public office, medical doctors, and public servants remain in the city.

- He recommended public hospitals be built to accommodate those with the plague.
- He condemned people who took unnecessary risks that put themselves and others in danger of contagion.

¹ Earlier in the year a group of clergy in Breslau had asked Luther to give guidance on what they should do if and when the plague struck their town. Now, in the midst of dealing with the issue up close and personal in his own city, Luther began writing a response. He completed his work just before the plague cycle in Wittenberg ended, in late November of 1527. ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton cites Luther’s essay in a pastoral letter to ELCA leaders and congregations March 6, 2020.

- He encouraged the use of reason and medicine.
- “God has created medicines and has provided us with intelligence to guard and take care of the body,” he wrote, “[So] Use medicine; take potions which can help you; fumigate house, yard, and street; shun persons and places wherever your neighbor does not need your presence.”²

What Luther wrote he also lived. When the plague reached Wittenberg in August of 1527, Luther ignored the recommendations of his prince that he flee and instead remained in Wittenberg to care for his people. He and his wife Katie took several people who were infected into their own household so they could care for them.

In a letter to ELCA congregations on Friday, our presiding bishop, Elizabeth Eaton, wrote:

We are living in the time of the coronavirus. We are also living in the time of social media and constant, relentless news coverage. Many of our people have the same concerns as those in Luther’s day. Many of our people are anxious. Luther’s counsel, based on Scripture, is still sound.

- Respect the disease.
- Do not take unnecessary risks.
- Provide for the spiritual and physical needs of the neighbor.
- Make use of medical aid.
- Care for one another, especially the most vulnerable.

We all have a role to play in caring for each other and the larger community.

I see the precautionary action we’ve taken in canceling worship as an act of stewardship.

As people of faith we stand in a long line of forbearers who, like Abram and Sarai, Martin and Katie, have come to trust that God is at work in the world for good, even when the trajectory of the current challenge we face is unclear.

Of one thing we can be confident: God comes alongside us now, as then, and will use us in this uncertain time as we pray, encourage one another, and care for one another’s needs—and the needs of the most vulnerable among us.

Let us pray...

Good and gracious God, we look with you at the families, communities, and countries around the world where people are suffering greatly from the consequences of the corona virus and its effects both on bodily health and economic well-being.

Be with all the frontline responders and health professionals who put themselves in harms way every day in order to provide care and to seek solutions. Give wisdom and insight to doctors, researchers, and government leaders as they seek a path toward the containment and effective treatment of COVID-19.

Finally, keep our community safe and well while we are absent from each other, and strengthen our bonds through prayer and encouragement, for we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Today is March 8 and I will be at Peace from 9:30am to Noon on this Daylight Savings Sunday.

If you would like to talk or pray together, you can call me at the church #: 206-935-1962.
The peace of the Lord be with you always.

² Ibid.