



# OUR REDEEMER

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## LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Rev. Matthew D. Ruesch, Pastor

12 March A+D 2020

Dear Friends in Christ:

*“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.”*

- Psalm 46:1-3, ESV

When Martin Luther wrote “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” he based it on the words of Psalm 46, quoted above. There are varying accounts of when and why Luther penned the hymn. One suggestion was that he wrote it as the Lutheran princes were preparing to go into the Diet of Speyer in 1529 to defend their faith against Emperor Charles V. Another theory is that it was written as a sort of “battle hymn” as Europe was being threatened to the east by the Ottoman Empire. Whatever the circumstance, we know that Luther and his colleagues found tremendous comfort in the words of this Psalm. The Christian doesn’t need to fear because God is his “refuge and strength.” God is a “fortress.”

Among the fears that Luther would have encountered was a breakout of the bubonic plague in 1527. Surrounded by the sick in every direction, Luther counseled Christians to remember the command from Jesus Himself to “Love your neighbor as yourself.” A breakout of sickness was no occasion to ignore Jesus’ command and Jesus did not put any conditions on that statement.

As fear and panic erupts over COVID-19/“coronavirus,” we Christians are left asking ourselves how to best “love our neighbor.” You may not be overly concerned and think all the hyping and pushing of the story by the media is way overblown. But if that’s your conviction, be gentle with your neighbor who is scared. “Love your neighbor”...with no conditions attached.

Whatever happens, we are not a people of fear. Jesus has said, “Love your neighbor,” so that’s exactly what we will stand ready to do. “We will not fear though the earth gives way” because Jesus is Lord and He is the Victor over death and the grave. Along with loving our neighbor, He has also told us, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me” and “This cup is the new

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covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” (1 Corinthians 11:24-25, ESV) Jesus has told us to eat His body and drink His blood. We will not stop doing that now or at any point for as long as we are given to do so in this world. He attached no conditions to that eating and drinking. It’s what His people do...even in times of crisis.

We are left to figure out the best way to balance doing what Jesus has given us to do by coming to His Holy Meal and how to best love our neighbor. It’s a balancing act which sinful people will struggle with. Some people will find these measures annoying and unnecessary. Others will think that more should be done. Whatever the case, “Love your neighbor.” With that being said, here’s what we’re doing at Our Redeemer in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak:

1. If you are unable to leave home because of flu-like symptoms or a weakened immune system, please let the church office know and I will try to visit you as best as I’m able according to the situation. There’s a difference between fear and a reasonable concern that going out into public will put your well-being in danger. I trust you to make that distinction and will be happy to visit you at home and bring you Holy Communion.
2. We have eliminated as much hand-to-hand contact as possible. We have already eliminated the “sharing of the peace” that we do at the end of the service so no one feels compelled to shake hands with someone. Bulletins will now be available at the welcome kiosk when you come into the door, rather than an usher handing them to you. If you aren’t welcomed with a handshake on Sunday morning, don’t feel like we’re not pleased that you’re here! We’re just taking precautions to eliminate unnecessary spread of germs.
3. Because the church needs to run, we can’t eliminate the passing of the offering plate. And because we heed the Lord’s Word, we can’t eliminate the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. That being said, those are the two elements of the service where there is common touching of surfaces and hands. I routinely make sure my hands are sanitized prior to the distribution of Holy Communion. I will be adding in a trip to the back room to wash my hands during the offering. I have also reminded the elders who aid in distribution that they should wash their hands thoroughly before communion distribution. If you do your best to make sure that your hands are kept clean, particularly before the service, it will help to minimize the spread of germs via the offering plate and the distribution of Holy Communion.
4. Hand sanitizer is difficult to purchase at this time. We made attempts to procure more of it this past week, but found it’s sold out nearly everywhere. We do have a good amount of it already. There is hand sanitizer on the welcome kiosk. Please use it when you enter the building and feel free to use it before you leave. There is hand sanitizer on the table where the donuts are served after the service. Please sanitize before placing your donation in the

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basket and then before taking a donut. When it's available, washing your hands with hot water and soap is preferable to using hand sanitizer. If you have your own hand sanitizer, using it right before and right after the passing of the offering plate is greatly appreciated. We ask that if you have some of your own that you carry it with you on Sunday morning. Again, while that might seem unneeded to some, that's part of loving your neighbor and keeping his conscience clear.

If you have specific questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me by e-mail, cell phone, or social media. As I reminded our Thursday Bible Study group this morning, times like this...when we are under attack...are when the Church is at its best. Jesus has promised that "the gates of hell shall not prevail" against His Church. If hell can't prevail over us, coronavirus can't either!

God's peace be with you as we carry out the tasks the Lord has entrusted to each of us as His dear children.

In Christ our Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pastor Ruesch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pastor Ruesch

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