

Faith Seeking Understanding in the Providence of God

Welcome and Call to Worship:

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea...The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress” (Ps 46:1; 11)

Prayer:

God our father, in these uncertain and troubled times we cry out to you and declare that you are our safe place of refuge. We affirm that your love and your power is greater than the fear, anxiety and insecurity that troubles the waters of our heart. We rest in the assurance that in rapidly changing times the one constant thing is your faithfulness. We proclaim that nothing is greater than you, nothing is more powerful than you, and nothing can overcome you, and so we echo the words of the Psalmist and say, you are our fortress – a safe, strong and impenetrable comfort in times of need.

Thank you for reminding us today of this sure and solid truth.

Thank you for inviting us to know and experience peace, hope,

joy and strength in you. Thank you for faithfully hearing our prayers.

As we reflect in the stillness of this moment, we are mindful that this past week has presented us with unbelievable challenges. Each of them like a rock that weighs heavy on our heart and sometimes draws us under the water where and we find it hard to breathe, impossible to see ahead and difficult to rise above. Forgive us for losing sight of you and scrambling to become our own security. Holy Spirit, fill us with your breath of life, renew our tired bodies, refresh our weary souls and strengthen our troubled faith. In Jesus name, Amen.

Affirmation: God's mercy is new every morning, that is why we sing, 'Great is your faithfulness!' I declare that through the loving power of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit we are loved, forgiven and restored, Thanks be to God!

Notices: offering in progress; communion; Easter services; communication – Trevor, myself, office, email; continued fellowship – practice physical distancing while maintaining social connection.

Type Prayers:

Reflection:

- I don't have 1 particular passage that I'm preaching on today, but rather, I have a topic that I'll be teaching on called Faith Seeking Understanding in the Providence of God.
- It sounds like a mouthful, because it is.
- But what it means is, how do we make sense of what's happening in our world? Where is God in all of this?
- This is a huge topic, one that cannot be answered in 20 minutes, but I'm going to do my best to speak into these questions in the limited amount of time we have.

Firstly, the definition of the Providence of God from the Heidelberg Catechism: (1563, Reformed beliefs)

"Providence is the almighty and ever-present power of God whereby He still upholds, as it were by His own hand, heaven and earth together with all creatures, and rules in such a way that leaves and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and unfruitful years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, and everything else, come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand." (The Heidelberg Catechism," A. 27, in The Book of Confessions).

- In other words, it is a statement that says, God is in control of everything, and nothing happens outside of God's control.
- A key theological voice also speaks into this space:

1. Augustine (4th/5th Century Bishop and theologian)

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Augustine>

Augustine declares that the providence of God is at work by secretly and surely guiding people through twists and turns towards faith in Christ and entrance into the church. God's divine purpose is not worked out coercively, or from some external force, but precisely in and through one's own free decisions and actions. He believes God permits disintegration, social breakdown, war and other evil events. God does not cause them but permits them to occur to accomplish the divine purpose. God exercises sovereignty bringing good out of circumstance that are negative and destructive. (Augustine City of God, 13.4).

- Now this simply states that the all-powerful, ever present, all knowing God is aware of absolutely everything that happens in our world – right down to knowing the hairs on our head, and the words were about to speak, even before we speak them. (Luke 12:7; Psalm 139)
- And God will cause all things to work together for his good purposes.
- This brings us comfort and peace, until we face times of struggle and chaos and confusion.
- Eg, while the death of an elderly person who has lived a full and rich life brings us sorrow, it doesn't usually threaten our faith.

- However, the suffering or death of a young child or young adult through cancer or some other disease will prompt questions about God's role in such an event.
- We start to question, 'if God is all powerful, all knowing and ever present, why is He letting this happen? Why isn't He doing anything about it?'
- On one hand, the Christian faith confesses the Lordship and providential care of God over all the world. We know that God as creator does not abandon the creation, leaving it to run on its own. God's continuing care for all creatures is declared in many passages: Gen. 9:8-17; Ps. 104; Matt. 6:26-30; 10:30.
- And on the other hand, we find ourselves in this season of incredible chaos and uncertainty. While COVID-19 may take a significant number of lives, it's the after affects that will cripple our world.
- And our Christian faith and understanding is challenged as we begin to wonder where God is in all of this, or even, if God causing it? Is this God's judgment on a sinful world?
- Let's **take a look at Scripture** and see what the Bible says about how God acts and interacts in the world.
- Let us start at the very beginning (Maria VonTrap says it's a very good place to start 😊)

“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³ Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.” (Genesis 1:1-3)

- Genesis was not written as a scientific explanation for how the world was made. It was written to give the Hebrew people an understanding of both theirs and God’s identity.
- They had only been exposed to Egyptian and Babylonian world views, and it was compromising their understanding and experience of God (YHWH).
- Moses compiled this to give explanation to God’s identity and their identity as the people of God.
- The very first thing we notice in this scripture is **God created light and life out of darkness and chaos.**
- This is the key and fundamental character, nature and essence of who God is. God is light and life and God creates light and life wherever there is darkness and chaos.
- Absolutely everything we read in scripture from now on must be interpreted through this key aspect of God’s nature, character and essence.
- Absolutely everything we see throughout history must be interpreted through this key aspect of God’s nature, character and essence.

- God always creates light and life out of darkness and chaos.
- God does not create darkness and chaos.
- God may allow it so that He can work His wonders in and through it. But the key to understanding God's work in the world, is to see it through the lens of God bringing light and life in the midst of darkness and chaos!
- Let me remind you of the story of the man born blind:

"As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." (John 9:1-5)

- Jesus is the very essence, nature and character of God.
Therefore, it is clear in this story, that God doesn't bring darkness and chaos; God is light and life and thus brings light and life wherever darkness and chaos exist.
- COVID-19 is not from God, it is not God's judgment for sin.
- God's judgement for sin is completely covered, accomplished and fulfilled in and through Christ.
- What this means for us in our current season of darkness and chaos? **We have hope!**

- We can rest, we can trust, we can find peace for our souls.
- Hear the Psalmists declaration of truth:

¹God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

*²Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;*

*³though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble
with its tumult.*

*⁴There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.*

*⁵God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.*

*⁶The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.*

⁷The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

⁸Come, behold the works of the LORD;

*⁹He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow,
and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.*

¹⁰“Be still, and know that I am God!

I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.”

*¹¹The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.” (Psalm
46)*

- It means that whatever happens in our life or in this world we have immovable hope that says, ‘God is with us, bringing light and life working all things for His good purposes.

- We may or may not see it yet, but God is at work in our world and in our lives.
- Let us be still and know the providence of God!

Prayer: