

Gracious God, open our ears that we may hear your truth, open our eyes that we may see your kingdom, and open our hearts and minds that we might know the cries of our brothers and sisters who are hungry, and hurting, and sometimes even dying without the knowledge of your love for them. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Here we are in week three of our self-imposed shutdown. A shutdown that is precipitated by the desire to minimize the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Now, I am no scientist and I won't pretend to be one, but the scientists and the medical professionals are urging us to take these drastic measures of "social distancing" or self-isolation so that the spread of this disease can be slowed and they have a good reason for these restrictions. Right now, our medical system is being pushed to the brink. By taking measures to slow the spread, or flatten the curve, we are hopefully giving our medical infrastructure some breathing room as (ideally) they prepare to deal with this disease that has no immunity, no vaccine, and no cure... at least not at this point in time. This is a dangerous situation and the sacrifices that are being made are coming at a cost to our economy as jobs are lost as businesses close or make major adjustments to their method of operation.

It is no longer business as usual in the United States, or in the world, for that matter.

It is a time when the fear of the unknown is grabbing ahold of us.

Because of this fear, many of our worst characteristics are on display. We are hoarding things like toilet paper and cleaning products and we are stocking up on staples in a way that has stripped the shelves of our grocery stores bare. The supply chain is stretched to the max as industries struggle to keep up.

At the same time our medical system, dealing with the burden of treating the ever increasing numbers of patients infected with COVID-19 are running low *on* or running out *of* the personal protective equipment that they need to treat patients while providing protection that they need to prevent the virus from infecting them and their families. Our hospitals face being overrun by the number of people who will need ICU level care and they face a shortage of the ventilators and other equipment that these patients will need in order to be treated.

We are living in a time where lament is at the foundation of where we are in our faith. We can understand and empathize with the psalmist as he writes, “Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! (Psalm 130:1-2, NRSV)”

There are voices that try to convince us that what we are experiencing is the wrath of God for this reason or that reason and regardless of the reason that they may cite, they are just plain wrong. God is NOT out to get us for our sins and hammer us if we don't toe some imaginary line that we cross whether we know it or not. That is bad theology that mocks the Gospel message of a loving God who wants to re-establish the relationship with God's creation... a relationship that was soured by sin. It is through God's work in the person of Jesus Christ that reconciliation between the Creator and the created happens. It is through God's initiative that we experience a reset where all offenses are forgiven by God and we start fresh with a clean slate.

In this morning's word from the prophet Ezekiel, we find ourselves in a vision of a lifeless valley that represents the despair of the people of Israel as they were living in exile during the Babylonian captivity. The nation had been conquered and all that they had known was now in the past.

But God had other plans. In the vision that the prophet describes, we find that God is sending a message that all is not lost. The people of Israel may have lost all semblance of normality, but there is hope. And that hope lives in the God of creation once again creating life out of death, creating hope out of despair and creating substance out of nothingness. In a sense, God is resetting the nation of Israel and offering a new future to a people who had given up and who died in place.

They had forgotten who God IS. They had forgotten that God was a God who brings health, hope, and healing to a world that is desperately in need of health, hope and healing. But these things come in God's time, not ours. In our area, we are only in the third week of "social distancing" and we're stressing out. In some cases we are acting like spoiled brats who are throwing a temper tantrum because we're not getting our way. Our lives are changing. Our circumstances are changing... and we don't like it one bit.

But the psalmist offers another way, "I wait for the Lord, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch in the morning, more than those who watch in the morning. (Psalm 130:5-6)"

Perhaps instead of being consumed by fear, we would be better served by waiting for the Lord. Or as the Psalmist invites us in Psalm 46:10, perhaps we should "be still and know that I am God!"

Perhaps that is the problem. When we become still, when we sit in silence, or in solitude in our confinement, we don't like the voices that we hear in our head. We don't like the silence because it is in the silence that we are confronted by the things in our life that we don't like. Perhaps in the silence, we see in the mirror the things that separate us from God and we are ashamed. In the hustle and bustle of life we can hide these things, but in the solitude of silence, we *must* face them.

But God invites us to rest in Him.

God invites us to “be still and know...” to “be still.”

And in the stillness, God invites us finally “to be.”

As followers of the living Christ who sacrificed everything so that we might have life and have it abundantly, I invite you to take advantage of the stillness and to seek that rest that comes in the arms of the God who loves you and gave up everything for you.

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Trust in God. For God IS with us.

Thanks be to God.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.