

## Still Preparing for Easter

Church Family,

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior! As we live through this Coronavirus outbreak and as we are experiencing all the things that go along with it, let us remember that God never changes, and our Salvation through Jesus Christ will never be shaken. In our efforts to try and ensure that everyone in our congregation is being both reached with the love of God and fed spiritually I am writing to you once again a message of encouragement that you can use in your personal time of worship.

I want to begin by reminding you that this is still the Lenten season; a season in which we prepare our hearts to celebrate the work God did through Jesus Christ during the Easter Season. Maybe this year, due to the social distancing and the self-quarantine of many, we can identify in a new way with those who lived through the first Easter season. Remember they too were living through some very uncertain times, especially those who had been following Jesus.

Let's think for a moment about the situation that they found themselves in and let's see how it compares to our current situation. Let's pick up the story of Easter just after Jesus has served the Last Supper to His Disciples and after He has taken them to the garden of Gethsemane to pray. You can read of this part of the story in Matthew chapter 26:17-55 or Mark 14:12-52. After Jesus gets done praying, Judas shows up with a crowd of armed men and Jesus is arrested.

As Jesus is arrested...all of His Disciples flee! *Mark 14:50* says, *<sup>50</sup> Then all his disciples deserted him and ran away.*<sup>(NLT)</sup> Where did they go? The majority of them went to hide or practice "social distancing" and "self-quarantine" due to fear for their lives. In fact, the Disciple John, records this very thing in *John 20:19a*, *<sup>19</sup> That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders.*<sup>(NLT)</sup> These were the very men who had seen all of Jesus' miracles and heard all of His teachings first hand, yet they were still human and were still afraid during their time of uncertainty.

Let's pause the story there for this week and process what Jesus' Disciples might have been feeling and what we might currently be feeling as we experience isolation and maybe even fear or anxiety about what is happening.

**We might feel alone.** The Disciples had grown accustomed to seeing Jesus every day and hearing Him teach, but now Jesus wasn't with them and they couldn't be where Jesus was. In the same way, we have been accustomed to going to a church

building and meeting with people as we worship God, yet now we cannot do that. What do we do to deal with the feeling of being alone? We must apply the truth of God's word to our hearts by reading or reciting His word when we feel alone. We can also turn these verses into prayers thanking Him for being a God who is always with us. Here are some verses to remind us that we are never truly alone when we know the Heavenly Father.

### **Deuteronomy 31:6**

*"<sup>6</sup> So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the LORD your God will personally go ahead of you. **He will neither fail you nor abandon you.**"*<sup>(NLT)</sup>

### **Isaiah 41:10**

*<sup>10</sup> Don't be afraid, for **I am with you.**  
Don't be discouraged, for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you and help you.  
I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.* <sup>(NLT)</sup>

We need to be reminded that **NOTHING** can separate us from God's love, and proof of that is displayed through Jesus Christ!

### **Romans 8:31-38**

*<sup>31</sup> What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? <sup>32</sup> Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? <sup>33</sup> Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. <sup>34</sup> Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us.*

*<sup>35</sup> Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? <sup>36</sup> (As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.") <sup>37</sup> No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.*

*<sup>38</sup> And I am convinced that **nothing can ever separate us from God's love.** Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. <sup>39</sup> No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, **nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*** <sup>(NLT)</sup>

**We might feel scared or anxious.** Certainly, the verse in *John 20:19* tells us that the disciples felt afraid for their lives. Fear is an emotion and a normal response to certain situations. It is not a sin, but we must not let fear control us or limit our view of God. It can be a fearful time to be separated or not know what the future might hold. We don't have to deny these feelings of fear or anxiety; we can acknowledge them and then give them to the LORD. Pray and hand these fears to Him and receive back His peace, because He will take care of you!

### ***1 Peter 5:7***

*"<sup>7</sup> Give all your worries and cares to God, for **he cares about you.**" (NLT)*

### ***Matthew 6:24***

*<sup>24</sup> "No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money.*

*<sup>25</sup> "That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? <sup>27</sup> Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?*

*<sup>28</sup> "And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, <sup>29</sup> yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. <sup>30</sup> And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, **he will certainly care for you.** Why do you have so little faith?" (NLT)*

**We might not know who to trust.** In days where there is a lot of conflicting information being passed around it can be confusing to know who to trust. We are seeking truth, but at times it can seem difficult to locate a place to find it. The Disciples had already heard Jesus tell them who to trust and where to find truth; it's a great reminder for us too in these days.

### ***John 14:1-7***

*"Don't let your hearts be troubled. **Trust in God, and trust also in me.** <sup>2</sup> There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> When everything is ready, I will*

*come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. <sup>4</sup> And you know the way to where I am going.”*

*<sup>5</sup> “No, we don’t know, Lord,” Thomas said. “We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?”*

*<sup>6</sup> Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup> If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him!” (NLT)*

**We might not know how our needs will be met.** The Disciples had quit their jobs to follow Jesus, and now that Jesus had been arrested and was being sentenced to be crucified, their livelihood seemed to be coming to an abrupt end. Maybe your livelihood has been diminished or came to an abrupt end due to the current situation in our country. Who will meet our needs?

### **Matthew 6:31-34**

*<sup>31</sup> “So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ <sup>32</sup> These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but **your heavenly Father already knows all your needs.** <sup>33</sup> Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, **and he will give you everything you need.** <sup>34</sup> “So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.” (NLT)*

My friends, we may live in uncertain and unsettling days, but we can be certain who our God is, and when our lives are built on Him, we will not be shaken! As you continue to prepare to celebrate Easter please keep worshiping God even by looking to Him to help deal with the feelings you are facing in these days. I assure you that God is big enough to deal with them and loves you enough to take care of you!

Please don’t forget the other ways that we are reaching out as a Church Family in these days of separation.

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Love and Prayers for you all!

Following Christ,

Pastor Mike Martin