



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School
1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 22, 2020

“You, Lord, are My Hiding Place”

Ps. 32:7

March 22, 2020

*“You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance.” Psalm 32:7*

*Every day, Everywhere, By Everyone....sharing
the grace of the Good Shepherd.*

Collect: Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning; and though we deserve only punishment, You receive us as Your children and provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

As a child, where was your favorite place to play “Hide and Seek”? Mine was at Grandpa and Grandma’s farm. There were very good hiding places there . . . for instance tucked away behind and underneath bales of hay. In that darkness what I needed most was patience and perseverance. But there was always the sneaking suspicion my brothers, Andy and Paul, had done it to me once again. They had told me to hide, counted out loud to 30, and then sauntered into the house to watch Gilligan’s Island.

Today, it’s more difficult to find a good hiding place, but it does require just as much patience and perseverance. This virus is so small; it’s essentially weightless. It can linger viable in the air nearly three hours. It is viable on hard surfaces for up to nine days, and if you order groceries delivered to your door, it may be on the cardboard box for up to 24 hours, or the receipt, or the plastic bag that housed the carrots. Who can hide from all that? So this pandemic will test our hiding places, our hygiene habits, and our patience and perseverance.

In the Bible, there are a lot of people looking for hiding places. Adam and Eve are the first. They figure they can hide from God behind some bushes. They’re not very sophisticated sinners just yet. “I was naked” Adam said, “So I hid myself.” Adam blames Eve. Eve blames the serpent. Cain kills Abel. Sin spreads like a pandemic down through the generations, no one is immune. And hiding becomes a survival skill, a matter of life and death. The Cuttlefish becomes a master of camouflage, blending into the ocean floor to protect itself. The fawn has dappled fur like that of the sunlight on deep grass. The new-born infant Moses is hidden for three months from Pharaoh. Jacob hides from the wrath of Esau. David hides from Saul in a cave. The infant Jesus is hidden from Herod’s paranoia in Egypt. The disciples hide in the upper room behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. The early Christians hide among the catacombs.

Martin Luther was hidden away at the Wartburg Castle for ten months. And today, we join the rest of the world trying to hide from a virus behind an E95 mask if you're fortunate to have one, and behind another pump of Isopropyl Alcohol if you have that, or behind closed doors at home.

Sometimes our hiding places aren't so effective. Sometimes they don't serve us well at all. During this pandemic, don't let drinking become your hiding place. All kinds of trouble will find you there. If the abuse of drugs becomes your hiding place, your family, your job, your money, your body, mind, soul, they all become not hidden, but exposed, vulnerable, up for grabs. If pornography becomes a hiding place, you'll eventually be found out. If you think government can and should hide you from this pandemic or its effects, you will be sorely disappointed.

So hiding is one of the things we do. Sometimes, we even try to hide from God. Like Adam and Eve, we know our sin so we hide from him. We pretend it never happened, or that it was someone else's fault, or that God doesn't know about it, or doesn't really care.

For some, their hiding place from God is distraction . . . so busy, so active and preoccupied that they have no time or energy to ask the important questions of God. Maybe that will be one of the blessings God works through this pandemic. It's beginning to impose a lot of unstructured quiet time on a lot of people. Under the threat of disease and death and economic instability, this has a way of getting our attention and forcing us to ask the important questions of life. That can be very healthy for individuals who to date have felt little need for a Savior. That can also be healthy for us, who believe but can grow lukewarm or indifferent.

We may try to hide from God but no one can. Jeremiah 23, "Am I only a God nearby and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him? Do I not fill heaven and earth?" (vv. 23-24). And Psalm 139 reminds us we are not really the ones who seek after God. He is the one must seek after us. "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your. . . right hand will hold me" (vv.7-10). It may be hard to hide from this virus. It's impossible to hide from the omnipresence of our God who will one day come to judge us.

In the book “Giants of the Earth” by Ole Rolvaag, the author talks about how the early settlers were amazed by the immense size of the American prairies, the vast emptiness of the prairies – no homes, no hills, no trees, just mile after mile of prairie grasses. They saw very few birds or other animals. The author says, “If life is to thrive and endure, it must at least have something to hide behind.” So it has always been and is today. “If life is to thrive and endure, it must have something to hide behind.” The message of our psalm is that God wants to be our hiding place, not one from whom we flee, but one to whom we run for protection from the bullies on the playground, sin, death and the devil.

God is the only one who can shield us from their bullying, behind whom we can rest easy knowing we’re safe. Therefore, David confessed in our text, “You Lord, are my hiding place.” Far better than any remote cave, David knew only the Lord could protect him from those bullies. Think of this pestilence as just another bully from which the Lord is our Protector.

Psalms 91, “He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.” No other hiding place can protect us from temporal and eternal death like the Lord. No other hiding place will suffice. Flee to him.

Yes, we are sinners before the Lord, so the temptation is to flee from him rather than to him. David knew he was a sinner. He confessed, “Against you, and you only Lord, have I sinned and done what is evil.” That’s a spiritual problem, a problem with God. Spiritual problems demand spiritual solutions. Spiritual problems are not fixed by raiding the liquor cabinet or the refrigerator or by smoking a joint or by working and playing so hard that you have no time to think.

Spiritual problems demand spiritual solutions, and Jesus on the cross is the Lord’s solution for our spiritual problem. At Golgotha, Jesus is not keeping his head low, he’s holed up at home in heaven behind locked doors. No, he’s hung up there high and sprawled out, nearly naked. Up there he is exposed and vulnerable to everything, from physical and verbal abuse to the

hellish punishment for our sin; vulnerable to death, even his corpse vulnerable to the probing of a spear. The cross offered no place to hide, either from the wrath of men or the wrath of God. But that's the point. Jesus came to die for our sin so that you and I might be hidden in him and live.

The Lord is your hiding place. Frankly, you have none other, none worth talking about. No one can hide a sinner like the Lord can. In any other place those bullies of sin, death and the devil will find you and flush you out. Only in Christ are you safe. Hide yourself in him. Be hidden in him. Let his love cover over a multitude of sins. That's what you need the most during these strange days, a good hiding place in the Lord. That's what your neighbors need too.

During the second world war, the subway system deep underneath London was where citizens fled during the frequent air raids. Down there they were safe from the bombs and shrapnel, safe from collapsing buildings and raging fires. They were down so deep that the deafening fury of those bombs was reduced to distant thuds. They knew they were safe. They knew nothing could touch them down there. Parties erupted spontaneously. Musicians played their instruments. People sang. The bombs couldn't even be heard over the music. Makes me think of Psalm 23, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." A fortress with walls so high and so thick that those inside could relax and enjoy a nice meal, despite the raging of their enemies on the outside.

Now, if as a Londoner you had known of the safety of that hiding place, don't you think you would have made sure your family and friends and neighbors knew it too? Don't you think you would have said, "Don't bother with your cellar. You're still in danger there. Let me show you where it's really safe, where it's so safe we celebrate and even sing.

Even now (especially now), we still have obligations to our neighbors. We are still called to love, serve and witness to them. It's safe to say this pandemic is on everyone's mind. We are all preoccupied by it, anxious and fearful. What an opportunity for each of us to tell them about the ultimate hiding place. What an opportunity to be a light in the darkness. What an opportunity for Christian confidence and assurance to stand out against fear and fatalism. It's not that we're immune from this virus. We know we're not. It's just that we're safe in the

Lord, come what may. Even if death takes us, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. That faith will ultimately show itself. The Christian witness is never stronger than in times of adversity. I'm thinking of the early Christians who sang hymns of victory, Easter hymns, even as they were being hauled off to their Roman executioners. Their neighbors couldn't get over it. It left a mark on them. It was unsettling to them. Maybe they were missing something important. The church grew because of their strong witness to Jesus.

We're not being arrested and hauled off, but there is high anxiety in the air, and we have a great hiding place from it, the only sure one, and we also have a duty to our neighbors . . . not just to check in on them to break the isolation, but also to point to Christ the Lord as our Savior. People are looking for hope today. You have hope to give, a singular hope in Jesus. For the Lord is your cleft in the rock. He is your ark in the floodwaters. He is your shelter from the stormy blast, your pool in the desert. He is the cloak of righteousness that covers you over. He is your fortress, your shield, your refuge, your strength. He is the outstretched wing over your head. He is your hiding place, the only one to which a sinner may flee, and he will remain your hiding place until heaven itself shall hide you. Amen.

