

What we're all going through

We currently find ourselves in a challenging and uncharted time of social distancing, in an effort to save lives. It all seems surreal. *And yet it is all . . . too . . . real.* A virulent virus is extending across the world in ways which we have never before personally seen. Truly, the Corona pandemic is spreading across the globe in plague-like proportions. And yet, despite all the confusion and anxiety about what will happen next — there is still the assurance that God is in control. He is . . . in . . . control . . . of everything . . . EVERYTHING.

Let us then, approach this time of uncertainty, not with fear, but with faith . . . and with confidence . . . and with hope . . . knowing that God is working everything together for our good (Rom. 8:28). As to what God's purpose is, in allowing Covid-19 to paralyze the world, is beyond our ability to say. Perhaps it's a wake-up call for the world to repent. Perhaps it's God's judgment on the world for sin. Perhaps it's an admonition for the Church to pause and to reflect on all the blessings we have in Christ. Possibly it's none of the above OR all of the above and much, much more, for God's thoughts and his ways are infinitely higher than our own (Is. 55:8-9). And yet, we can all rest assured that our Father, our Shepherd, will yet lead in paths of righteousness, and that his goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives (Ps. 23:3, 6).

In the meantime, let's use our unexpected days of quarantine, and distancing, and disinfecting as an opportunity to spend time with family — and time with God — and do so together, even if we need to be physically separated. And in so doing, we will find comfort, strength, grace, and blessings. Indeed, it's an extremely rare and precious occasion in which we can readily set aside much of the clutter in our lives and truly focus on who and on what are most important.

And so, in an effort to facilitate families (or roommates, etc.) in having such spiritual times together, the congregation's ministers will be providing on-line Bible study aids (in various formats) each Wednesday — until we are able to gather together again as an assembled body. To begin, we will be studying together from the book of 1 Peter. Families (or a couple of students, etc.) are encouraged to read the passages, sing, and pray together. By God's grace, this will be a time in which we can grow *SPIRITUALLY* closer to one another, despite all the physical social distancing.

1 Peter 1

The book of 1 Peter was written by the apostle Peter in the early AD 60's. It was a challenging time of intense persecution of Christians by emperor Nero. It was a time of uncertainty, confusion, doubt, and fear — much like the days we are currently experiencing. People were frightened of what might lay head. It was a time of foreboding and apprehension. And so, Peter, by inspiration, writes this short letter to encourage the Christians to “STAND FAST in the grace of God” (1 Peter 5:12).

Pray together.

1 Peter 1:1-2

- What strength and assurance can be found by remembering that we are only strangers (exiles) in this world? How can this same assurance comfort us in these uncertain days? (See also Heb. 11:13-16; Phil. 3:20).
- God (through his omniscience) foreknew our future obedience to the gospel. In what ways does that provide us with a sense of great security, in spite of all the apprehension currently being felt around the world?

“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure” (Heb. 6:19).

1 Peter 1:3-9

- Under the circumstances of their ongoing persecution, why is it especially significant that Peter refers to their “LIVING hope”? What other type of hope can there be?
- Peter bases their living hope on the fact of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. What were the real life and death implications for these first century Christians?
- Which would be easier: to physically be put to death because of our commitment to Christ OR to stay spiritually strong through a few weeks of social distancing? How is your faith holding out so far?
- Describe the inheritance which lies ahead for those who remain true to Christ.
- How does the fact that the faithful are shielded / guarded by God's power affect your response to the current pandemic?
- Notice how salvation is a continual process in Scripture. We are saved at a point in time (Eph. 2:8); we continue in salvation, if we hold firmly to the word (1 Cor. 15:2); and ultimately we receive our eternal inheritance of salvation. Where do you find yourself along this continuum? Is it where you would like to be?
- We rejoice in the assurance of our salvation, and yet we may experience various griefs and trials during our earthly sojourn. What is the ultimate purpose behind these various times of suffering (v. 7)? Does having a understanding of why God allows us to suffer make it easier to undergo times of distress? Why or why not?
- Though none of us have ever seen Jesus, we believe in him and we love him. Why?
- Describe the JOY which we have in Christ (vss. 6, 8). How is joy much deeper than happiness?
- What is the goal / outcome of our faith?

1 Peter 1:10-12

- What were the OT prophets intently searching for (which even angels longed to look into)?
- Do you think that we have a tendency to take Christ's death, resurrection, and exaltation for granted?
- How would Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation be an encouragement to these early Christians as they were being persecuted by Nero? What encouragement can we find in these same events as we go through these disruptive days?
- The OT prophets were given divinely inspired messages which are primarily for OUR benefit. What does this say about God's timetable and his ultimate control over the universe?

1 Peter 1:13-16

- List the 5 exhortations (actually imperatives) which Peter gives in these verses. *Depending on the version you're reading from, some of the imperatives may have been translated as participles (verbs ending in "-ing")*.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
 - 5.
- In light of the current world crisis, why is it important that we, TOO, take these imperatives to heart?
- Why does Peter emphasize that their hope needed to be fully set on the future grace which they would receive when Jesus comes again, versus pinning their hope on the present?
- What reason does Peter give for living holy (set apart) lives?

1 Peter 1:17-21

- What reason does Peter give for living our lives as strangers (exiles) in the world?
- Why do you think Peter *reiterates* our temporary status on earth (see v. 1)?
- Prior to our redemption through Christ, how much value did the way we lived our lives have?
- What OT parallels come to mind in viewing Jesus as a sacrificial lamb? (See 1 Cor. 5:7; John 1:29; Ex. 12:26-27).
- Jesus was chosen before the creation of the world, to offer his life as a sacrifice, to pay the price for our sins (Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor. 6:20). That is, God knew even before Gen. 1:1 that we were going to sin and yet he loved us SO much (John 3:16), that he decided even BEFORE CREATION to provide a way to redeem us. What does this say about God's power and his love? What strength can we gain by reminding ourselves about these things?
- Why do you think Peter *again* emphasizes Jesus' death, resurrection, and glorification (see v. 11)? What encouragement will we receive by constantly remembering the same?
- Compare Peter's words about "hope" in vss. 3, 13, and 21.

1 Peter 1:22-25

- Peter again stresses *obedience* as the means of purifying ourselves (see vss. 2 and 14). It is through Christ's blood that we're redeemed, our sins are washed away (Col. 1:14). As a result of our purification, what does Peter tell us to NOW do? In light of our current social disruption, suggest ways that we can still implement Peter's admonition.
- Yet again, Peter brings up a topic he's already mentioned, that of a new birth (see v. 3). What is it that brings us new birth? (See also Luke 8:11.)
- How is the word of God different from ordinary seed?
- What significance is there in saying that the word of God is "living"? (See also Heb. 4:12.)
- How are men like grass and flowers? Again, how would this be an encouragement to these first century Christians? What encouragement does it bring also to us?

Pray and sing together.