

March 28 & 29, 2020
Message: Evidence in the World
Pastor Liz Whitford

*The LORD is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*

*⁹ The LORD is good to all,
and his compassion is over all that he has made.*

*^{13b} The LORD is faithful in all his words,
and gracious in all his deeds.*

*¹⁴ The LORD upholds all who are falling,
and raises up all who are bowed down.*

*¹⁵ The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.*

*¹⁶ You open your hand,
satisfying the desire of every living thing.*

*¹⁷ The LORD is just in all his ways,
and kind in all his doings.*

*¹⁸ The LORD is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.*

*¹⁹ He fulfills the desire of all who fear him;
he also hears their cry, and saves them.*

*²⁰ The LORD watches over all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy.*

*²¹ My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD,
and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever.*

- Psalm 145:8-9, 13b-21

The last few weeks have been something that we were not prepared for. How many of us were emotionally ready for this kind of isolation? In amidst the Corona Virus school closings and social distancing, I was truly quarantined at home with Influenza B. Not exactly how I wanted to be ministering to a community in need. Instead of comforting those who were feeling isolated, I was stuck staring out a window to what looked like a cloudy ghost town. (Good job with social distancing!) I must admit that even as an introvert I was feeling the horrible effects of isolation. It felt amazing to be able to see cars driving around when I was finally free from my quarantine. Just 2 days before we were given the Safer at Home instructions. Isolation is real...even for introverts.

Even as far back as a week ago, the anxiety that has encased our world has made everyday life what seems like what one friend called a "George Orwell novel". In amongst our anxiety and our fears, our God is still here. When we are unsure of what exactly the future holds, there is still a Case For Christ.

So, on a lighter note, recently I have been infatuated with Veterinarian shows through Disney+, easy to watch when you're sick on the couch. There's "Dr. K's Exotic Animal ER," "Dr. T., Lone Star Vet" (another exotic animal vet), and my new choice of binge "The Incredible Dr.

Pol.” Dr. Pol is a Vet that serves all sizes and types of animals (even though he is not as excited about exotics). From these shows, I can now guess when an animal has a prolapse. Isn’t that the best knowledge to have?! Not my point though. (You needed a laugh, didn’t you?!) In each of these shows the Veterinarian is known for their ultimate love and care for the animals and is willing to do whatever it takes for the animal’s best interest. Even during a time when the best recommendation is humane euthanasia the vet spends time with the farm owner, the pet owner, the person who rescued the animal from the road. From the arrival, through the investigation, trials of the tests, to the realization of the solution, there is Jesus’ teaching of love.

The psalm we just read is what is known as the only song of praise within the book of Psalms. Within Psalm 145, we are given a place of contentment, a place of connectedness with our creator. It praises the name of the Lord by reciting the attributes and actions that comprise the character of the Lord.

Listen as I list just 8 of them. God is gracious. God is slow to anger. God is steadfast love. God is good to all. God is compassion to all creation. God is faithful. God raised me up. God is just. God is near. All words that when we are feeling spiritual, are easy words for us to describe God.

How about when we are social distancing? Does it seem as if we are social distancing from God as well?

We may get bogged down by the feeling of all that is out of our control, and we lose sight of the God who is in control. Our God who is gracious, who is steadfast love, who teaches us the value of relationship in ANY way, shape, or form.

There is hope in this social distancing thing. I love how creative people have gotten. The idea of the “Social Distancing Scavenger Hunt” where people put things on their front windows so that as families walk by they can see something new. The idea of drive-by birthday parties, where ones who are celebrating their birthdays at this time can still feel the love of those around them, just in a different way, more like a parade. The idea of doing Roll Call to check in and see how everyone is spending their time, to make sure people are ok.

God can be seen and shared outside of our regular places. You know: the Bible, the sanctuary, the church in general. Within our Lenten focus, there is the idea that Christ can be found outside of the Bible. We know this to be true as we have seen our faith take shape over our years as Christians. But what about those who haven’t? There is the need for proof. Proof that he actually existed.

Some of us have heard of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Dead Sea Scrolls are a grouping of manuscripts found in 1947 dating back to from 250 BC to AD 68; found too late to be a part of the canon, but have on occasion helped us to connect the Old Testament with the New. In the particular example that we find in the book, was the discovery that when Jesus was questioned about whether he was really the Messiah he referenced part of Isaiah 35 with an added phrase. When the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, the archeologists discovered that all of what Jesus said was actually apart of Isaiah 35.

Archeological proof of Jesus' identity through prophesy.

One other aspect of proof that we consider is Good Friday, where Jesus was convicted by Pontius Pilate.

We hear of Pontius in the gospels as the Roman governor who condemned Jesus to death. Interesting tidbit. Until 1961, there was no actual proof archeologically of his administration. Everything he had worked on, worked for had crumbled away and disappeared. But, in 1961, a piece about 2 1/2'x2' of limestone was recovered that archeologists are sure he used as he ruled over Judea. That's it! He is very prevalent in our story, yet in the lives of others, is that fact enough?

These two examples only show a speck of the evidence outside of the Bible which shows Christ to the world. There is so much more we could look at. But why does this matter to us?

As young people it was/is mandatory to read history in school, and for some of us, we hoped and maybe still hope for the day when we would not have to read it again. How many of us have found now to be utterly enthralled with all that history has to teach us! We not only know history from eyewitness accounts. We know the accounts to be true from stone, from papyrus. It has a beauty to it. Doesn't it make you wonder why it is still here, if God did not want us to find it?

It has beauty to it. A lot of life has beauty to it.

In a world where we are finding ourselves less and less in control, may we find the beauty, may we find the ways in which we see God in the world, so that we may share it with those who need it, even in social distancing.

*The LORD is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
9 The LORD is good to all,
and his compassion is over all that he has made.*