

Dear Friends

As I have been ill since the end of February with an inflammation, I have not been out of the house - except for doctor's appointments. So, in a way I have been experiencing a quarantine for more than three weeks now. I was hoping to join back St. Ursula's at the earliest.

Since Switzerland has declared a state of national emergency we all are likely to spend some more time at home though. Thus I would like to share some thoughts with you on remaining true to Christ under these circumstances. I hope these words will give you food for thought and encouragement.

With every blessing

Archana

Thought for the week – what is our foundation?

“The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock” – Matthew 7:25

The parable of the wise and the foolish builder is one of my favorite parables. The parable teaches that building one's life on Jesus is like building a house on the foundation of a solid rock. That house can weather any storm. Let's face it: disaster often hits sinners and saints alike. Yet, in Jesus game plan all you need to survive it is spiritual preparation. When we build our life on the foundation of God's Word, we can find safety despite the downpour and heavy wind outside.

While bearing this eternal truth in mind we also have to figure out how the change in our circumstances affects our Christian discipleship and our witness to the world. Below are some areas I could think off which need to be readjusted to the new circumstances.

Gathering in the name of Christ

Obviously, meeting with believers and fellowship in a Church building is not an option anymore. Imagining an Easter without being able to worship at Church breaks my heart. Yet, we need to remember what Jesus so very clearly has promised.

“Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” – Matthew 18:19-20

The smallest church does not meet in a church building but in your four walls. If you happen to live with other Christians in the same household, you are highly encouraged to gather in the name of Christ and HE WILL BE WITH YOU. What a wonderful promise and what a great relief!

Worship

“Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

“Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

– John 4:19-24

Human beings have argued for many centuries about the right place to worship. The existence of various denominations shows that there are even many more areas Christians can disagree about. Yet what really counts according to Jesus is whether the true worshiper will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for those are the kind of worshipers the father seeks. At the moment we do not have the choice to worship in the church. But we still have the freedom to worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth in our home, in the hospital bed and even when in confinement. This might need a bit of organization and thinking through. I personally thought that the material Helen sent in her various e-mails was very helpful and uplifting.

Fear, anxiety, worry, pain and loss

“My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” - Psalm 73:26

Living in the midst of turmoil and uncertainty is not easy – especially when your loved ones are far away or maybe even battling at the front lines. This is the time for us to remember though who our God is. Countless accounts in the bible help us to remember who God is. We learn that our God is the God who sent plagues on Egypt and was able to make sure that his people stayed safe and secure all the while. He is the God who promised young David to make him King over Israel even though he had to run for his life. All the while God protected David from his father-in-law Saul who chased to kill him. And yes, Jesus touched the leper without getting ill himself. Please note, that I am NOT encouraging anyone to go around without proper safety and hygiene measures. That would be reckless. What I am much rather saying is that if you have to get out of your home as part of your work or in an emergency you can count on God to take care of you. On the other hand the Apostle Paul encourages us also to think beyond this life to live boldly by saying:

“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” - Philippians 1:21

And

“If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.” - Romans 14:8

As Christians we believe that our purpose is to love God and that through Christ we have eternal life. Even though we might lose our physical life, we will never lose our life. Moreover we know that Jesus

feels our pain and walks with us when we feel lost and overwhelmed – guiding us, comforting us and giving us new hope.

When Jesus arrived, He found that Lazarus had already spent four days dead in the tomb. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, a little less than two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them in the loss of their brother. So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet Him; but Mary stayed at home.

Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give You whatever You ask Him.”

“Your brother will rise again,” Jesus told her.

Martha replied, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me will live, even though he dies. And everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?”

- John 11:17-26

If you have some more time, look up the following bible passages:

- Luke 24:13-35
- Mark 1:29-31
- 1 Corinthians 15:42-44
- 2 Corinthians 4:17-18
- Psalm 34:18

Ministry and witness to the world

With social distancing and other regulation in place one might feel defeated at times. Many might wonder how they are supposed to be an effective disciple of Christ in a situation like this without being able to go out and meet people. Once again a look into the bible proves that being forced to stay in a certain location is never going to stop God from using us as a witness to the world.

We find that many portions in the New Testament were written by Paul while being in prison.

“Pray in the Spirit at all times, with every kind of prayer and petition. To this end, stay alert with all perseverance in your prayers for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, divine utterance may be given me, so that I will boldly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it fearlessly, as I should.” – Ephesians 1:18-20

Thanks to modern day technology there are many ways to keep in touch with each other – on the phone, on skype, e-mails, letters, cards etc.

Moreover Paul's behavior and attitude in prison surely left quite a lasting impression on the authorities as well as fellow prisoners.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household. – Acts 16:25-34

Besides singing under these difficult circumstances Paul also sets an example to us by submitting to authorities (instead of running away at the first opportunity!). At first, many in the general public found it difficult to adhere to the recommendation to stay at home during this crisis. As followers of Christ we should try to make the authorities' job easy by following orders whenever we can (and as long as they do not ask us to act against the will of God). By doing so we reach two goals 1.) We submit to authority 2.) We love our neighbor as ourselves and protect those who are vulnerable by not becoming a virus carrier.

Rejoicing and praying

"This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." - Psalm 118:24

These days might not be the happiest we spend on earth and we might want to pour our hearts out to God. That is OK and I think, that God can handle the vastness of our emotions. On the other hand, there is a chance that in the midst of this chaotic situation there are moments we cherish, moments of laughter and moments of finding new meaning. It might even be that many of us have complained before that we are not able to spend more time with the family and that we are not getting any rest. So why not make space for these things now?

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be apparent to all. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 4:4-7