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PASTORAL LETTER – MARCH 14, 2020

Dear friend,

I must admit that it is truly scary to see how illness can change the direction of our lives. The emergence and unrelenting pace of the Coronavirus has made life more complex, difficult, harsh and scarier.

Now, you may be thinking that this is turning out to be a depressing pastoral letter. It isn't.

In the face of these uncertain and precarious times, let us not forget about the greatness of our God and the resourcefulness of the human spirit, which is that spunk that God has deposited in every single one of us.

Someone who was afflicted by grave health and personal concerns was the Apostle Paul. He took his concerns to God, who in turn strengthened Paul's inner resolve to help him live faithfully. Paul then left us with the following enduring words, which speak to the inner strength that God gives us for hard times.

“We do not lose heart. We may be afflicted, but we are not crushed. We may be perplexed, but we are not driven to despair. We may be persecuted, but we are not forsaken. We may be knocked down, but we are not destroyed.”

These are some wise words to live by. So, what should we continue to do? Remain strong in our faith. Remain connected to God in the form of prayer. Think about the prayer known as the *Jesus Prayer*, which goes as follows, **“Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me. Make haste to help me. Rescue me and save me. Do Your will in my life.”** Follow this prayer by uttering *The Lord's Prayer*. As an aside, another way you can pray is through song: “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8XUYZoguhEQ>) and “How Great Is Our God” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKLQ1td3MbE>).

Also, consider reading of the Bible (Psalms 23, 26, 46—the latter is known as the Psalm of Holy Confidence—and 91, and also the Gospels, are a good place to start), as a way of keeping positive and spiritually centered.

In fact, one of my personal favorite verses in the Bible goes as follows:

Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare
and from the deadly pestilence.
He will cover you with his feathers,
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
(**Psalm 91**)

Moreover, continue to heed the best practices being put forth by the health experts and government officials related to the virus during these challenging, health-related times. As Christ said, in order to survive in this fallen and broken world, “**we must be clever like a serpent, humble like a dove**” (**Matthew 10:16**). In other words, we must be practical, shrewd, and pragmatic.

Lastly, we may ask, what should I continue to do? Be a healer. Explore opportunities, within reason, to do good acts of healing in a world rife with many hurts. Think about someone who may feel afraid and vulnerable and be a healer through your thoughtfulness and generosity of time. For example, check on fellow congregants. Consider dropping off a meal. Continue to do what you, Rhinebeck Reformed Church, do exceptionally so well, which is to serve each other lovingly, passionately, and helpfully.

May God endow our source health experts with the wisdom to help cure the world, and may we, through our faith and acts of love, heal the brokenness of the human soul!

In Christian love and friendship,
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