CHUNGDONG FIRST METHODIST CHURCH

ENGLISH MINISTRY

ONLINE FAMILY WORSHIP, MARCH 23TH, 2020

Dear Chungdong Family,

Welcome to our online worship service. Due to the spread of the COVID-19, Chungdong First Methodist Church, English Ministry will continue worshiping online until further notice. We hope and pray that things will get back to normal soon. In the meantime, please join us with your family and friends for the online worship. You can follow the liturgy here along with the video sermon. Click on the links provided for hymns. The order of service has been simplified to include a prayer and two hymns. We will keep you updated with regards to services during the following weeks. Please remember to pray for the country, the leaders and those affected by this crisis.

This week's preacher is Rev. Joung Chul Lee.

Home Worship

Welcome

Welcome to today's service. Let's just bow our heads and pray. You're welcome to follow our morning prayer on the online bulletin.

Call to Worship[1]

Leader: The earth shakes, the mountains quake -- tempting our hearts to fear.
People: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
Leader: Rivers overflow their banks – too far away to quench the wildfires, yet we remember,
People: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
Leader: When our children are away from home and out of our sight, we take comfort in knowing.
People: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
Leader: Whether we have reached the end of our days or the end of our diagnoses, we rest in the truth that
People: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
All: God, you alone are our refuge; you alone are our strength. We look to you in these troubling times.

[1] https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/a-call-to-worship-for-troubling-times

Song of Praise

Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4O9kw3cILpg

Opening prayer

Prayer for a Pandemic[2]
By Cameron Bellm

May we who are merely inconvenienced
Remember those whose lives are at stake.
May we who have no risk factors
Remember those most vulnerable.
May we who have the luxury of working from home
Remember those who must choose between preserving their health or making their rent.
May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their schools close
Remember those who have no options.
May we who have to cancel our trips
Remember those that have no safe place to go.
May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult of the economic market
Remember those who have no margin at all.
May we who settle in for a quarantine at home
Remember those who have no home.
As fear grips our country,
let us choose love.
During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other,
Let us yet find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbors.
Amen.

Worship Song

Love Divine All Loves Excelling
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qwHxRxER650&list=PLS4jQgASCDFKKnsrST9YQVft3DxlbteyA&index=5

Confession of Faith

We believe in God, the Creator of all that we see and all that we do not see.
We believe in Jesus Christ, God becomes flesh; in death the Forgiver of sinners, in rising the Healer of the broken.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, God within us, Comforter, Strengthener and Friend.
Amen

[2] http://krugthethinker.com/2020/03/prayer-for-a-pandemic/

Prayer for illumination:

Prepare our hearts, o Lord, to accept your word. Silence in us any voice but your own; that, hearing, we may also obey your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Gospel Reading

Matthew 22:37-40

New International Reader's Version (NIRV)

37 Jesus replied, " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Love him with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and most important commandment. 39 And the second is like it. 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' 40 Everything that is written in the Law and the Prophets is based on these two commandments."

Sermon

Wisdom from Luther

Introduction

- Currently, we are facing many challenges.
    - COVID-19 spreading more widely, globally;
    - Doesn't seem to end soon;
    - Economy goes unstable;
    - No vaccine yet;
    - Schools start late, parents struggle;
    - Especially 12th graders;
    - Churches haven't had worship services for weeks;
    - Cluster infection happened in a church last week
- So, I begin this sermon with a heavy heart.
- As a preacher, I am also facing another challenge. What message should I deliver? What does God speak to us today? I've tried to hear God's voice but to be honest with you, what I have is not the clear voice of God but the mind full of heartbreak and grief for all of us, for all humankind, and of the fact that human beings, who seemed that they could do everything they wanted, actually are so weak and vulnerable.
- To find wisdom, I have tried to go back to Christian traditions and find if there was any similar situation in the past; and then I have found one interesting letter written by Martin Luther, the reformer. He had faced a similar challenge and left a record of his letter that he wrote to someone who was asking him whether it was OK to flee when the plague occurs.

- His answer was very inspiring, helping us realize what to think about at this moment. So I'd like to share it with you today and would like to see what lessons we can have from his letter.

Luther's Letter: "Whether One May Flee From A Deadly Plague"

- Luther was born in 1483, so basically a person who lived in the 15 and 16 centuries. During his time, the disease known as the Black Death, or 흑사병 in Korean, was a huge problem. It first appeared in the 14th century and was widely spread until the 17th century. The record says that almost 100 million-200 million people died due to the Black Death. So, one person wrote a letter to Luther, asking if it is okay to flee when a deadly plague occurs, or what and how to do when such a situation happens.
- Luther himself was not able to respond to the person immediately for some reason. Maybe he was not sure what to say as if I wasn't sure what was the message of God when I was preparing this sermon. Some people say that he was sick as well. But the person sent more letters to him, so he decided to write this letter with a quite lengthy answer.
- And let me try to summarize it:
    - First, he says, leaving is fine. If you can leave, leave.
        - It's not a bad thing. He says we have so many examples in the Bible who decide to leave to save their lives: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Uriah, Elijah, Moses, etc.
        - It is a natural response of human beings to flee from a dangerous situation. Also, it is how we protect ourselves given by God and how we care about our Creator.
        - So he says that there is no need to judge or criticize those who flee.
    - Second, he says, but there are people who need to stay.
        - They are those who have public and pastoral responsibility such as ministers, doctors, nurses, mayors, judges, etc.
        - He reminds of John 10:11-12: **"A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep but the hired hand sees the wolf coming and flees.**"
        - Also Luther says that parents and other caregivers should not leave unless they have arranged someone to take care of those of whom they have been taking care.
    - Lastly, no matter whether you decide to stay or not, he emphasizes that one thing you need to keep in mind is to look around and see if there is anyone who is in need of care.
        - He says, "**Godliness is nothing else but service to God. Service to God is indeed service to our neighbor**."
        - And he underlines that the neighbor does not simply mean just a random person around us, but who needs care and help: the needy. The sick and the poor.
        - In one part of the letter, he says, "I**f you wish to serve Christ and to wait on him, very well, you have your sick neighbor close at hand. Go to him and serve him, and you will surely find Christ in him, not outwardly but in his word.**"

        - In the other part, he says Psalm 41 [:1–3], "Blessed is he who considers the poor. The Lord will deliver him, protect him and keep him alive."
        - By saying these, he says, do not desert your neighbors. And find who needs help.

Interpretation

- So, I think what he says overall is this:
    - Self-care: Do all you can do to avoid the plague.
    - Public-care: If you are serving the public, your work precedes your self-care.
    - Neighbor-care (Needy-care): you don't want to save yourself alone. Take care of the needy. That's the most important thing, because "what you did to one of the least is what you did to me" [Matt. 25:40].
- From him, we learn many things. Especially, he teaches us that what we need to primarily think about during this time is how we can practice our love for God and neighbors: the basics!
    - For him, caring about themselves, finishing their public duties, and taking care of the needy were the ways to love God and neighbors.
    - Then how about us? First of all, we should realize that even in this crisis, the question we need to ask is not necessarily something like: will this crisis end? When will it be? When will the vaccine be ready to use? How much does the stock price go down more? But this: how can we practice our love for God and neighbors even during this time?

- **First: I think we should do our best to keep ourselves safe and well from the virus. This is our spiritual practice.**
    - According to Luther, that is a way to take care of not only ourselves but also our neighbors. Keep ourselves safe is a way to keep our neighbors safe.
    - So we need to keep the prevention rules as much as we can. We need to wash hands, do social distancing, and wearing masks. You probably haven't thought that keeping those rules are spiritual practices or faith practices, but they actually are; because we want to do that not just for us, but for our neighbors.
    - This is also why we are not having worship services at the sanctuary. We do so not because we're fearful, but because we believe that that is a way to practice our love for our neighbors and larger society.
    - Luther says, do your best to flee from pestilence. If you know the pestilence is coming but you don't do anything, that is a testing God, which you shouldn't do. That is like that you don't run out of the house even though the house is on fire; or it's like that you don't take any medicine even though you are sick; and saying you trust in God, you believe God will deliver you or what comes to you is the punishment. Luther says, that's not trust, that's a suicide before God.

- **Second: It's also important to keep ourselves informed with the most accurate and recent information regarding COVID-19.**
    - Keeping us informed with the accurate information and sharing the right information with other people are all our spiritual practices as well.

- It's been a serious problem that people share lots of wrong information through church related Kakao chatting rooms.
- People receive the message that has some information, and they think that that information is important; so they send it to someone else without cross check; but in many cases, when those messages do not have clear resources, there is a high chance that that is false news.
- Organizations such as the National Counsel of Churches in Korea, Christian Ethics Movement in Korea, point out that Christians should feel the responsibility when they share any information with other people.
- Last week, there was one church that caused the cluster infection because of misinformation. How sad it is. They tried what they thought was right. But it brought a totally opposite situation.
- We are responsible for even keeping ourselves with the right information. That is also our spiritual practice we can do now.

- **Third: We should also turn to our eyes from ourselves to the needy.**
  - According to Luther, it's not enough to keep ourselves safe from the disease. We should take a look at the invisible corner of society and find who are in the blind spot.
  - When this kind of situation happens, the socially marginalized, the mentally disabled or physically disabled people face bigger challenges to survive. For example, soup kitchen is closed. It is also harder for them to buy the masks. It is much harder for them to live if they are asked to do self-isolation.
  - There are lots of groups of people who need more care during this time such as doctors, nurses, delivery riders, etc.
  - So I think it is time that churches need to think about how to help those people.
  - The list goes on. However, let me wrap it up here. I would like to share one website link (written in Korean) that introduces some organizations that need help at this moment: https://www.peacemomo.org/boardPost/101739/103. So, you may want to check the website or you may want to do your own research to find people who need help.

Conclusion

The point is this: 500 years ago when the Black Death was a pandemic, Luther said do your best to get away from pestilence. He also said at the same time, do not think about yourself alone, look around give attention to the needy.

He implies that taking care of ourselves and to take care of the needy around us are both the ways of worship, ways of honoring Christ, ways of loving God and neighbors.

So my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ I want to encourage you to think about what will be the best ways to love God and Neighbors at this time. I want you to think about very concrete and practical methods you can do.

Closing Hymn

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wu2aeo-GXxs

God go before you to lead you, [3]
God go behind you to protect you,
God go beneath you to support you,
God go beside you to befriend you.
Do not be afraid.
May the blessing of God the Father,
Son, and Holy Spirit be upon you.
Do not be afraid.
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen.

Benediction

God go before you to lead you,

God go behind you to protect you,

God go beneath you to support you,

God go beside you to befriend you.

Do not be afraid.

May the blessing of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be upon you.

Do not be afraid.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Amen.

Amen.

[3] *Text: Anonymous, alt., based on the "Breastplate of St. Patrick" Music: Roy Hopp © 2012 GIA*