

Grace Reformed Church Newsletter

April 27, 2020

This week's verse to reflect on:

“Glory in His holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always.” Psalm 105:3-4

During the past 5 weeks, there have been 4 frequent questions asked of me. Let me share those questions with you today and my brief response for each of them.

The first question goes something like this – “In view of the coronavirus pandemic, are we living in the last days before Jesus comes back to earth?” If we have been on social media or watching some television pastors, we have already heard a variety of responses to that question. Much depends on our understanding of the phrase “last days.” There are some Christians who believe that the “last days” do not really begin until all true believers are raptured and the years of what is called “the great tribulation” are initiated. Other Christians believe that the phrase “last days” include all the years of history between the ascension of Jesus into heaven and the time of his second return. Whatever we believe, it is important to remember the words of Jesus when he said, “No one knows about the day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man...Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.” (Matthew 24). Personally, I do not think we can say anything definitively as to whether the sudden emergence of this virus is a prelude to the imminent return of Jesus. What we can and should say, however, is be prepared, be ready, and be observant. It may happen sooner than any of us think.

Another question I have been asked goes along these lines. “What do you think God is teaching us through this difficult time?” Such a question comes from the assumption that God always has an agenda of using trials and troubles to teach us something. What if, instead, we could reimagine times of trials and troubles as times for God to come alongside of us in our suffering, identify with us, and reveal His compassionate and caring nature? This certainly appears to be a common theme we can read in the stories of the Bible. Reread the story of Job in the Old Testament of your Bibles. Or, reflect yet once again on the words of Jeremiah, the prophet, in the Book of Lamentations. “Because of the Lord’s great love, we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning, great is your faithfulness.” (Lamentations 3:22-23)

A third question I have been asked is “When will we begin worshipping together again at our church facility?” In conversation with the Elders and Deacons, we have agreed that we will continue to follow the Executive Orders of our State Governor who just recently extended the “Stay-In-Place” directive until May 15. Since the date of that

decision is too close to Sunday, May 17 and since the following weekend is a Memorial Day National Holiday, the earliest we can hope for a “Grand Re-Opening Sunday” would possibly be May 31, 2020, which is Pentecost Sunday. Plans are already in the works of what that Sunday could look like and will be finalized in the next week or two. The common theme that seems to be emerging is one of “Celebration!” But again, much depends on what our State leaders have to say on May 15. It would appear, however, that something that will define our “new normal” at least for the immediate future is the use of face masks and hand sanitizers whenever we are in a public place. That would include (I would imagine) any place for worship. Some have already secured a face mask in view of this possibility. Others have not. Is it possible to ask for volunteers in our church community to make face masks if materials are needed or could be provided? We could then hand out those masks at our Grand Re-Opening for anyone who does not have one. What a gracious act of hospitality that would be! Please contact the church office this week if you would be willing to do this.

The last series of questions concerns a news item that has developed in the past couple of weeks. In case you have not heard, the potential candidate for the next Lead Pastor of Grace Reformed has informed us that he now desires to have his name withdrawn. That amounts to 2 pastors in a period of 6 months who have removed themselves from consideration as our next Lead Pastor. What a huge disappointment for the Search Team who have been working so diligently on our behalf! And, what a huge let-down for all of us as well. So now, the questions become “What’s next? Do we continue the search for our next Lead Pastor? Is God trying to show us something here? Could it be that we as a church community are not yet ready to be under the leadership of a new lead pastor? Could it be that our desire to pursue the future path of renewal and revitalization under the leadership of a new lead pastor is not the path God wants us to travel together? Can the leadership from our Classis give us any further assistance?” I can assure you that together with the Search Team, Staff, and Consistory, we will explore answers to questions like these in the days and weeks ahead. We will also do our best to keep all of you informed with respect to our next action steps.

Again, in this time of transition I remain committed to serving you as your Transition Pastor until we figure out what God is showing us and where God is leading us. Thanks for the privilege of using my gifts and skills to be of assistance to you during this time. Together, we can and we will make it through this time to a brighter and more promising future even though right now we are having difficulty seeing what that future might be.

Grace and Peace,

Pastor Jack

PRAYERS & PRAISE

Bernice Palma continues to progress following heart surgery. She is able to get out and take a walk each day. Continue to keep her in your prayers as she regains her strength and fully recovers. Larry & Bernice would like to thank everyone for their prayers and cards.

Ron Engels suffered a pretty bad head injury following a bike accident on Wednesday, April 15. He has returned to his home in Florida after being hospitalized a few days. Right now their plan is to return home to Michigan on May 4.

Harvey & Sheryl Steensma are beginning their return home from Florida. Please pray for safe travels.

Please say a prayer for Sandy Gort's co-worker who is showing signs of Covid 19 and awaiting test results.

Also please pray today for Betty Holmes. She is not well and also was being tested for the virus. Please pray for negative results for her and a quick return to health.

We continue to pray for Ken & Cindy Wylie's granddaughter, Rachel, as she waits for results after undergoing surgery on Wednesday, April 22 for breast cancer. Also, their grandson Wylie took a serious spill on his bike. Please continue to pray for healing.

We give thanks and praise for all those who are on the front lines doing essential work during this time.

We lift up in prayer those who are struggling with loneliness, financial hardship, mental health issues and other effects of this coronavirus epidemic. Please contact us if you have any prayer requests or if we can help you in any way!

From Pastor Heather:

As you know this stay at home time has affected our students but my heart truly aches for our seniors. Remember back to your senior year and all the items you looked forward to your whole school career - the day you walked out of your high school for the last time. We have some amazing young ladies that will not have this opportunity and, as you can imagine, it has been tough to swallow. Would you please join me in encouraging these amazing young ladies by sending a card or a note of encouragement to them this week:

Kaedra Adam, 2862 Woodward Ave., Wyoming, MI 49509

Abby Kubiak, 2902 Boone Ave SW, Wyoming, MI 49519

Ashley Pippin, 3625 Oak Valley Ave. SW, Wyoming, MI 49519

Brielle Wigent, 6153 Autumn Dr., Hudsonville, MI 39326

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OTHER NEWS

Sunday Services will continue to be live on Facebook and Youtube at 10:00 am. Pastor Jack will share the message this upcoming week! Remember if you can't watch Facebook live, they will continue to be posted on FB and you can tune in anytime. In addition they are posted on our web page www.gracewyoming.org and youtube under gracewyoming.

If you would like to give your tithes and offerings online, please go to our web site at www.gracewyoming.org. You can give safely through this site. You are also welcome to send it in the mail directly to church (3330 Burlingame Ave SW., Wyoming 4509).