



Queen Anne

LUTHERAN CHURCH

Called to Proclaim God's Love in Christ for Every Person

2400 Eighth Avenue West • Seattle, Washington 98119

206.284.1960 • www.queenannelutheran.org

✂ *Staff* ✂

Pastor

Cantor

Children's Ministry Coordinator

Parish Administrator

Sexton

Lutheran Counseling Network

Serving as Assisting Minister today

The Rev. Dr. Daniel Peterson

Kyle Haugen

Terry Anderson

Barbara Bash

John Bryant

Sarah Tatterson

Tim Porter

This service of worship can also be heard online. Go to queenannelutheran.org and click on "WORD OUT" to find both audio and print resources for worship at home.

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

from March 8, 2020

"Word Out" audio transcript

Prayer of the Day

☞: O God, our leader and guide,
in the waters of baptism you bring us to new birth
to live as your children.
Strengthen our faith in your promises,
that we may trust you are with us
in the midst of the fear and uncertainty around us,
through your Son, Jesus Christ,
our healer and physician.

☞: **Amen.**

1st time: Choir. 2nd time: All sing.



Ⓟ: The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the third chapter.

Ⓞ: **Glory to you, O Lord.**

¹Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." ³Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." ⁴Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" ⁵Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." ⁹Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

¹¹"Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you

about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

☐: The Gospel of the Lord.

☑: Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon

Flee the Plague? A Conversation with Martin Luther
Pastor Dan Peterson

Plague: In 1527 it sweeps across the German countryside, one of many instances it would appear in Europe since its initial outbreak in 1350. John Hess, a pastor in Breslau, Germany, writes desperately to Martin Luther in Wittenberg. He has one question: Can a Christian flee the plague, or must he remain and tend to its victims?

Can a Christian flee the plague ?

Wittenberg: Bubonic Plague (or Black Death) surfaces in August of that same year. School officials, like ours, close the university where Luther teaches, admonishing students immediately to return to their homes. Luther remains, ministering to the first wave of victims while suffering himself from *cerebral anemia*, a condition where fewer red blood cells than normal reach the brain, one that can lead to permanent tissue damage and one for which there is no known treatment or cure in Luther’s time. Months passed; the Reformer, debilitated by his own failing health, finally responds to Hess. The title of his response: “Whether One May Flee From a Deadly Plague.”

Description: Luther begins with the opposition. There are some, he says, who are firm in the opinion that one need not and should not run from a deadly

plague. “Rather, they hold, since death is God’s punishment, which he sends upon us for our sins, we must submit to God and with a true and firm faith patiently await our punishment.” *I cannot condemn this view*, Luther says, reflecting what James Kittelson, author of *Luther the Reformer*, calls the “age of fire and brimstone” in which Luther lived, one where natural disasters and sickness are believed to come from God as a response to human sin. A way of thinking that would, taken here by itself, justify the consignment of Luther’s thought to the trash heap of superstition where it belongs.

But, surprise: Luther’s refusal initially to censure those who think it is the duty of a Christian to submit to God’s wrath gives way rather astonishingly to a different view. As one editor puts it, Luther here **fights against the notion that faith would protect a person from the plague.**

He writes, “I hear people say, ‘If war or the Turks come, one should . . . stay and await God’s punishment by the sword.’ That is quite true; let him who has a strong faith wait for his death, but he should not condemn those who take flight. By such reasoning, *when a house is on fire, no one should run outside or rush to help because such a fire is also a punishment from God. . . Freezing weather and winter are also God’s punishment and can cause death. Why run to get inside or near a fire? Be strong and stay outside until it becomes warm again (which never happens in Germany!). We should then need no apothecaries or drugs or physicians because all illnesses are punishment from God. (He’s mocking this view.) Hunger and thirst are also great punishments and torture. Why do you eat or drink instead of letting yourself be punished until hunger and thirst stop themselves? . . . Where would this madness end? Luther asks*” Luther’s turn to what we might today call “common sense” wasn’t so common in his time. And actually, after seeing the way people are reacting to the coronavirus, I’m not so sure it’s so common in ours either! After all, though we are absolutely right to be cautious when it comes to the virus, we are NOT dealing with the plague. We are dealing, rather, with a virus that is thankfully at least *less severe*. That said, Luther offers some surprisingly relevant advice for dealing with outbreaks of disease; and this morning I wanted to offer a few of them.

For starters, only those people who are necessary should tend to the victims. This includes doctors, pastors, public officials, and any individual upon whom an afflicted person is dependent.

Next, religious folk should not “tempt God” by saying they don’t need to take any precautions because God will protect them: There are some, Luther writes, who “disdain the use of medicines; they do not avoid places and persons infected by the plague, but lightheartedly make sport of it and wish to prove how independent they are. They say that it is God’s punishment; if he wants to protect them he can do so without medicines or our carefulness. This, Luther says, is not trusting God, but tempting him. God has created medicines and provided us with intelligence to guard and take good care of the body so that we can live in good health.” Luther condemns in fullest terms “God-tempters” – that is, people who say, “God will take care of it,” without recourse to medicine or the mind – Luther condemns in fullest terms God-tempters by the affect their attitude has, not only on themselves, but on other people: It’s one thing, he says, of making “no use of intelligence or medicine,” to harm oneself. “It is even more shameful for a person to pay no heed to his own body and fail to protect it against the plague the best that he is able, and then to infect and poison others who might have remained alive if he had taken care of his body as he should have. He is thus responsible before God for his neighbor’s death and is a **murderer** many times over.”

Luther adds additional practical steps his readers here can take: “Use medicines,” he says, “take potions (*I wouldn’t advise that*) which can help you; fumigate house, yard, and street; shun persons and places wherever your neighbor does not need your presence or has recovered, and act like a person who wants to help put out [a] burning city” He appeals to Scripture to argue that fleeing the plague, again, whenever “your neighbor does not need you,” is completely justified: “Examples, he writes, in Holy Scripture abundantly prove that to flee from death is not wrong in itself. Abraham was a great saint but he feared death and escaped it by pretending [before others] that his wife, Sarah, was his sister. Because he did so without neglecting or adversely affecting his neighbor, it was not counted as sin against him” Moses, Uriah, Elijah, David, Jacob, and Isaac, “All of them,” Luther writes, “fled from death when it was possible and saved their lives, yet without depriving their neighbors of anything but first meeting their obligations toward them” Most importantly, then, it’s the benefit and welfare of the neighbor that gets the most attention: “**No one,**” Luther writes, “**should dare leave his neighbor unless there are others who will take care of the sick in their stead and nurse them.**”

So let's put this all together:

Luther's basic response for his time to the question of whether a Christian can flee a disease, or in this case, the plague, should now, I hope, be clear. It depends!

If you are not needed, he says, then there is no reason to stay. Get the heck out! You are perfectly justified in leaving to ensure your own survival. If you *are needed*, however, then God calls you on behalf of your neighbor to remain. I think for example of the health care providers in this congregation. Theirs is a call from God, according to Luther, to remain if they are needed to help victims of this disease.

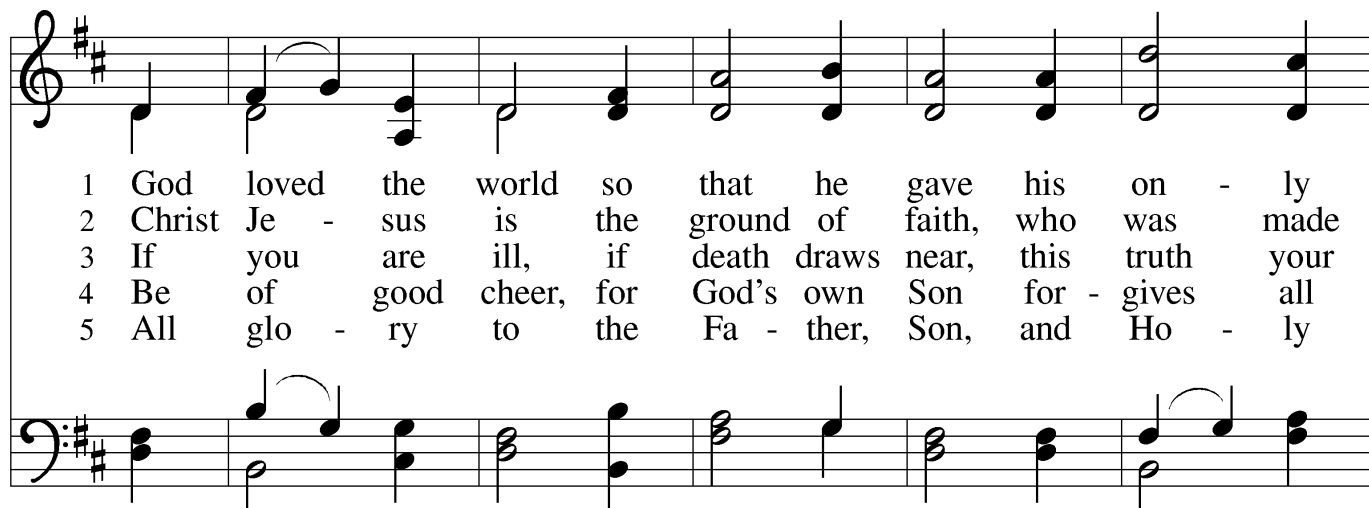
So what about us? What about 500 years later, our time? I think Luther offers here some surprisingly helpful advice:

1. Make others your priority, but do so in a way that doesn't *unnecessarily* risk your own health; this could be as simple as a phone call to check in on a friend.
2. Don't assume that as a person of faith, God will magically protect you; this is the thinking of Christian fundamentalists and modern-day vaccine deniers. Instead, make use of the medicines and the brain God gave you; **this is how God provides.**
3. Remember that by protecting yourself, you protect others. If you feel sick, don't expose others to what you have. It's not just about you; it's about your neighbor.

Plague: In 1527 it swept across the German countryside, one of many instances it would appear in Europe since its initial outbreak in 1350. Luther would survive it, along with two other outbreaks during his lifetime, tending to victims every time. Some scholars think he wrote his most famous hymn during one of these. Perhaps you've heard of it: "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" – a testament to the faith that empowered Luther to remain, to put his neighbor first, to rely on the gifts God had given him to help other people. May that same faith empower each of you to do for your neighbors what Luther did for his.

Amen.

God Loved the World



1 God loved the world so that he gave his on - ly
 2 Christ Je - sus is the ground of faith, who was made
 3 If you are ill, if death draws near, this truth your
 4 Be of good cheer, for God's own Son for - gives all
 5 All glo - ry to the Fa - ther, Son, and Ho - ly



Son the lost to save, that all who would in
 flesh and suf - fered death; all who con - fide in
 trou - bled heart can cheer: Christ Je - sus res - cues
 sins that you have done, and jus - ti - fied by
 Spir - it, Three in One! To you, O bless - ed



him be - lieve should ev - er - last - ing life re - ceive.
 Christ a - lone are built on this chief cor - ner - stone.
 us from death; that is the firm - est ground of faith.
 Je - sus' blood, your bap - tism grants the high - est good.
 Trin - i - ty, be praise now and e - ter - nal - ly!

↑ Prayers of the Church

A: Turning our hearts to God who is gracious and merciful, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

A: God of rebirth, empower your church throughout the world to be a voice of hope for those who fear judgment or condemnation. Assure us of your faithfulness and give us confidence to proclaim your salvation for all. Lord, in your mercy,

G: hear our prayer.

A: God of rebirth, your Spirit hovered over the waters and you called creation into being. Nurture and bless all signs of rebirth around us: budding trees and new shoots, thawing lakes and warm breezes, and animals awakening from hibernation. Lord, in your mercy,

G: hear our prayer.

A: God of rebirth, lead the nations in your way of righteousness. Protect those who advocate for the needs of children, migrants, and victims of violence. Give courage to lawmakers, lawyers, judges, and law enforcement officers, guiding them to do justice and to love mercy. Lord, in your mercy,

G: hear our prayer.

A: God of rebirth, give us a new vision of your healing power among us. Restore hope to those who remain in the depths of depression or despair. Bring mercy and relief to those who are injured, sick, or suffering especially those suffering from or affected by the coronavirus. Lord, in your mercy,

G: hear our prayer.

A: Congregation, for who or what else do the people of God pray?

The listener is invited to offer personal prayers at this time.

A: God of rebirth, by wind and spirit you call us into life renewed. We give you thanks for all your saints who have inherited your promises. Bring us, with them, into your everlasting kingdom. Lord, in your mercy,

G: hear our prayer.

A: According to your steadfast love, O God, hear these and all our prayers as we commend them to you; through Christ our Lord.

G: Amen.

Blessing

Benediction

P: Now is the acceptable time.
Now is the day of salvation.
Holy God,
speaking, spoken, and inspiring,
✠ bless you, unbind you, keep you, preserve you,
and send you in love and in peace.

G: Amen.