

Weekly Devotion September 28, 2020  
Pastor Matt Woods, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, Indiana

### “What Can Be Done When I Have No Control”

Recent days hold a strong reminder that much is not in our control. Currently we have some of our members in nursing homes with Alzheimer’s. We are still not allowed to visit them. One of them is in hospice care and still Pastor and I are not allowed to go in and see her. The hospice chaplain is allowed to but no one familiar. In spite of phone calls and efforts by the families nothing has changed. Last week when we wanted to see one of our members who was stat flighted to Lexington we were told not to come because we wouldn’t be allowed in to see her. For such situations standing outside of a window with a telephone simply won’t do. These people need the touch of a hand and a ministry of presence.

I’ve had the privilege of being at the bed side of many members who for various reasons remain in a state of unconsciousness. Such a condition often comes when a person is close to leaving this world and going to the Lord. It is my firm belief based on those many visits that being present, next to their bedside, holding their hand (Not even saying anything necessarily) brings comfort and confidence. Even in the most desperate of conditions I am convinced that those folks can sense not just that someone is in the room but who is in the room. To hear our voices and feel a reassuring hand holding theirs reminds them that they are loved and are not going to be alone. No one should die without loved ones being allowed in to see them not just for their sake but also for the family’s sake. What can be done if we are denied this opportunity?

It’s not just such things like this. What happens when one suddenly loses his or her job because of a Virus? What does one do when the doctor tells you that you have cancer or something else? What does one do when your spouse suddenly, decides to get a divorce rather than work it out? What do we do when the stuff that hits us is completely outside of our control?

Well, consider what Hezekiah did in 2 Kings 19 when he was threatened by Assyrians. The Assyrians were the super power of the day and had destroyed most of Israel; ravaging their cities, slaughtering the people without remorse. Times couldn’t be more desperate. Nor did it look like anyone would survive what was coming next. The Assyrians saved Jerusalem for last and had it surrounded and ready for destruction. Archeologists found a record of the event where Sennacherib was said to have Jerusalem couped up “like a caged bird”. Escape was not going to happen. Israelite traitors joined the ranks of the Assyrians and taunted the people to turn on Hezekiah; taunted the people to give up claiming he was leading them to death and should surrender; they proudly mocked the God of Israel as weak or none existent; All was laid out in a threatening letter. So, Hezekiah grabs that letter and goes to the Temple to talk with the Lord about it. 2 Kings 19:14-19 tell us...

<sup>14</sup> Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord. <sup>15</sup> And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord: “Lord, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. <sup>16</sup> Give ear, Lord, and hear; open your eyes, Lord, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God.

<sup>17</sup> “It is true, Lord, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. <sup>18</sup> They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands. <sup>19</sup> Now, Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, Lord, are God.”

This morning I would suggest that we take a note of what Hezekiah had done in the midst of the things he could not control. First, please note that Hezekiah made every effort to be a faithful King restoring the Temple and worship of the Lord. He also makes as many preparations as he could once, he knew that Assyria was coming.

Tunneling a shaft through 1,748 feet of solid rock to supply water to the city in time of siege (2 Kings 20:20).

Stopping up springs around Jerusalem that could supply water to an attacking Assyrian army (2 Chronicles 32:1-4).

Extending and strengthening the wall of Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 32:5a).

Increasing the production of shields and weapons (2 Chronicles 32:5b).

Organizing combat forces (2 Chronicles 32:6).

Once Hezekiah knew what he was dealing with he immediately did what was within his power to do. He knew that the Assyrians, who were known for showing no mercy, marched in the direction of little Israel it was not going to be good. Likewise, sometimes all we can do is make a defense knowing the damage is going to be major. For example, one of our friends knowing that her cancer would take her life eventually, did her best to make a defense—knowing that treatments were not going to work she wanted to hold back her cancer for as long as possible to be with her family. In another case, when one of our members knew he was going to be laid off started immediately looking for another job; even a job that paid less in order to keep things going. Sometimes we cannot prevent the damages that come but knowing that they are coming should inspire us to make a defense none-the-less for the sake of our loved ones. Sometimes that means getting our house in order. And sometimes we make the best stand that we can so that our courage may inspire those around us to carry forward. Sometimes we stand strong to inspire trust in the Lord above all else knowing that our resurrection hope is never broken.

Hezekiah remained vigilant. And even when it seemed most desperate Hezekiah didn't panic. He saw a good reason to go to the Lord. He asked, sought, and knocked on God's front door. Notice also that he took the letter and spread them out before the Lord and made his case. The point is that Hezekiah continued to trust in the Lord. He prayed to the Lord because he knew the Lord was with Him. And Hezekiah didn't rely on his own strength even though he had made so many preparations. He knew that the Lord could save the city. But what disturbs Hezekiah most is how his enemies mocked the Lord. He knows the Creator and ruler over all things. Hezekiah share the details of his situation and then says, "Now, Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, Lord, are God."

It's the same confidence in the Lord that the three men in the fiery furnace had later on in Daniel 3. Remember what they said? <sup>17</sup> If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. <sup>18</sup> But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." They didn't question God's love for them or God' character but simply made a statement of confidence and faith. God can deliver us but even if he does not, we will worship only the Lord. Hezekiah did the same thing. "Lord let Your name be honored."

We are all going to face things we cannot control. We can choose to surrender to them and live a very frustrated defeated life. Or like King Hezekiah we can make our stand; doing so believing and trusting in the Lord even when we just don't know how its going to turn out. And even when we don't know how its going to turn out we always know that our future is in the resurrection. We can do our best to be prepared with budgets, insurance, having an active prayer life, making a will, with tools that we have within our reach and building strong

relationships. And yes, definitely, pray. Pray every detail, every emotion, every thanksgiving, every opportunity. Ask, seek, and knock often. And finally remember who we are talking to. Jesus, Creator, who alone is God over all things and in His love for us has seen to it that even death which eventually is way outside of our control is overcome in His resurrection.

Now I am not suggesting today that Hezekiah's problems were not more complex. Nor am I suggesting that Cancer or Job loss, or even seeing someone in a nursing home is simple in a year of Covid. I am saying that we are never completely powerless to choose our response or how we will live out our faith in such circumstances. So, when you get the chance to see someone who has been locked down all these months without anyone allowed into see them – In my opinion ridiculously and unfairly... go; and go often. Hold their hand. Talk with them. Pray with them. Hug them. We are not designed to remain distant so do your best to close the gap. I know I try not to get too frustrated when it doesn't get better right now. But I am prepared and eager to go when I get the chance and pray for that.

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with His favor and give you His peace in Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Matt Woods  
John 3:30

Later in verses 35-36 we are told; <sup>35</sup> That night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies! <sup>36</sup> So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there.