

Hello, This is Pastor Matthew Woods From Grace Lutheran Church in New Albany, Indiana and this is the daily update for Wednesday March 25, 2020

## Words of Healing

Well it's finally happened. The end of the world must be close. Pastor Woods has gotten on to social media with Instagram. My son and daughter-in-law helped me discover a brave new world. I am learning how to post pics and what it means to "follow" someone and what it means to "like" something. Up till now I have been studiously avoiding such platforms but the events of late have given me a new appreciation of their potential and value.

I was amazed this last weekend when our services received over 3000 views on Facebook alone. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever imagine such a reach. I am truly humbled by it and grateful to be speaking to so many online friends and family members. I also received an email that said this last Sunday the internet saw its largest online audience in history because of the churches that broadcast online. I am heartened by the eagerness and hunger for God's Word. May those who have ears to hear let them hear.

I've been told in times of war that one of the most important things to establish is a line of communication. Our government has declared war on this virus. The sirens to take shelter have been sounded and so we have hunkered down. Because of the technology we have today we have a wide range of communication. But what are we actually hearing? We hear of statistics, exposure rates and governors forecasting dramatic numbers. We hear of possible votes in congress, of possible medications to combat the virus. We hear about the financial difficulty felt by many. We hear about plans, and price gougers, and of a vast number of things on the news and all over the net. But this last Sunday, many in our nation *chose* to get online and listen for God's Word. And thankfully we have a way to keep hearing the message of God's Word. We have a way of receiving it. God's Word has exploded way beyond our four walls.

Now is a very good time to listen to Jesus as He speaks to us though His Word. Romans 10 says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame."... <sup>13</sup> for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." ....<sup>17</sup> Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. Jesus' goal in hearing His message is saving you and me. Embedded in the Word itself is the saving power of the cross and the resurrection. Right now there seems to be an intensity to our hearing and a willingness by many more to listen. The Gospel is always brightest when the world gets darkest. But what are we listening for?

Jesus' reputation preceded Him everywhere He went. And everywhere He went we are told that Jesus often spoke in parables. When Jesus finished His parables He often finished by saying, "He who has ears to hear let him hear" such as in Matthew 13:9. This phrase was meant to provoke God's people to deeper thinking. It was meant to find a truth in the parable that would draw God's people closer to Himself.

The Gospel is not a recipe for what to do as much as it is a declaration of what has been done in Jesus. Pastor Kischnick often rips on my chili recipe for the chili cookoff because it's a vegan recipe. He often says things like, "You can't have a chili without meat. That's not chili." Somehow it makes him unsettled and uneasy but that's the fun. I've made my veggie chili the same way each year for over a decade. I can tell you exactly how to make it by heart. If we are listening to the Gospel for a recipe to fix our lives, or solve our crisis we are going to be disappointed. Most of us have recipes that we follow. We know how recipes work. The

scriptures are not a recipe that tell us if we do certain things we will get the result we want. The Word of God is more like a relationship than a recipe. Relationships are complicated and often fluid and yet they are defined by love, forgiveness, and responsibilities that enhance the relationship. Sometimes there is frustration, anger, and sadness while also feeling close to someone. As siblings of our Heavenly Father our relationship with Him and one another is not something to be controlled like a recipe. It is to be honored, nurtured and grown—and occasionally forgiven or healed. The life that Jesus has given and continues to give is a spiritual life that becomes tangible when it bears fruit and demonstrates love for Him through faith.

The Gospel is also a great disrupter. It will mess with your life and if it doesn't then it's not much of a Gospel. The Gospel by its very nature is designed to put aside the sinner and replace it with a new person saved. The Apostle Paul was once a success story by Pharisee standards. Top of His class he became the great equalizer, a zealous destroyer of Christians until Jesus came to Him in Acts 9 and turned His world upside down. Afterward He became the church's greatest communicator and witness. Paul writes in Philippians 3:8-10, "For Jesus' sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ<sup>9</sup> --<sup>10</sup> that I may know him and the power of his resurrection." The Gospel is designed to reorient our priorities and focus our hearts on Jesus above all else. Paul found freedom in Jesus and was literally liberated from the world on every level. He certainly caught all kinds of hell literally. His enemies and His problems were exponential but every time they took a swing at Paul, the church found more courage, and more reason to believe. We can certainly agree that things are disrupted right now—but maybe this is exactly where we need to be. Maybe at this moment we are better listeners. Maybe at this moment we have a better opportunity; a chance for perspective and clarity to be provoked towards a deeper faith. I pray we take advantage of it.

During this season of Lent I for one choose to see opportunity to be challenged by the Word of God. I see opportunity to be encouraged by the fact that thousands chose to tune into the Word of God—many who otherwise may have not have done so under normal times. I see blessings in ways that I have never anticipated. And finally I love the fact that the Lord continues to surprise His people. Once again he has greeted us with grace – in of all times when the world is so shaken. A fresh attention is being given to things like communicating, connecting, paying attention to others, expressing compassion, loving their neighbors, and the Word of God. Are these dark times or some of the brightest?

Please pray for the ongoing efforts of the Lord's Church to keep reaching many and that those who listen may have ears to hear that message and believe. Please continue to pray for President, congress members, and those who are working to exhaustion to find solutions and relief from the virus. Pray for doctors and medical people who confront the dangers of illness every day—that they stay well themselves. Pray for those who have no income and for those who are locked in fear.

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on You with His Favor and give you His peace.

Pastor Woods  
John 3:30