

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, ‘My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.’” – Psalm 91:1

Welp, we are sheltering in place, and it looks like we will continue through the month of April. I’m not sure how all of you are taking it; Some of you are likely frustrated, some of you are lonely, some are worried about financial or employment consequences, some scared and fearful, and some of you are relishing in this enforced “Sabbath” from some of your other duties and vocations. However you feel, know that the Lord is with you.

That last statement “the Lord is with you” can feel trite or hollow, I know, especially at times like this when the only news seems to be bad news or at best funny Facebook memes. That phrase can seem like an empty grasping for straws of hope when the crosses you each bear seem heavier than normal. But I wish with all my heart to remind you and encourage you with the scene of our Gospel reading from Sunday, John 11 and the raising of Lazarus. In the text, Martha tells Jesus, “I know that Lazarus will rise again on the last day”, in other words, I know that everything will EVENTUALLY be ok, that things will work out... “NO!” Jesus basically says, “I’m here now!” Martha was only focused on resurrection, fulfilled promises, sometime in the future, maybe May 1st or a week from some random Thursday... But hope, joy, a return to normalcy and social contact, **resurrection**, they aren’t just some future promise but they are NOW. All of these are fully manifest right now in Jesus, as He explains to Martha, “I am the Resurrection and the life.” As one author says,

“Jesus never meets a corpse that doesn’t sit up right on the spot. The widow of Nain’s son, Jairus’ daughter, Lazarus... they all rise not because Jesus does a number on them, not because he puts some magical resurrection machinery into gear, but simply because he has that effect on the dead. They rise because he himself is the Resurrection... the grand sacrament, the real presence, of the mystery of a kingdom in which everybody rises.”

So when I say that “the Lord **IS** with you”, it isn’t just pointing to some FUTURE date, it is saying that right now, the mystery of the resurrection, the fullness of Jesus’ kingdom, is surrounding you. You, as Psalm 91 reminds us, are dwelling in the shelter of the Most High, you are sheltering in place IN HIM, and HE WITH YOU. I don’t know when “normalcy” will return, or if it will even be normal... but I do know, as do you, that Jesus is Lord, and He is with you.

So as you shelter in Christ, make the most of this time. Re-orient your rhythms to our risen Lord. Join us for worship on Sundays on YouTube. Join together around God’s Word throughout the week on Zoom. Take a walk, start your day with prayer... Keep those spiritual disciplines you have sharp (worship, prayer, tithing), and what an opportune time to fortify those that need strengthening, or begin those that need beginning. More on this next time, but as a teaser, you are what you do. Don’t let the couch become your new normal, for worship (livestreaming) or for your daily life. We’ll be back together in the flesh sometime. Hopefully, and prayerfully, sooner than later.

Stay safe, be well, and trust that THE LORD IS WITH YOU.

Pastor Gruenwald