

# There is a safe place!

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16

3/22/20

Pastor John C. Berg

*<sup>1</sup> One who lives in the shelter of the Most High  
will stay in the shadow of the Almighty.  
<sup>2</sup> I will say to the LORD,  
“My refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust.”  
<sup>3</sup> Surely he will rescue you from the fowler’s trap,  
from the destructive plague.  
<sup>4</sup> With his feathers he will cover you,  
and under his wings you will find refuge.  
His truth will be your shield and armor.  
<sup>5</sup> You will not fear the terror of night,  
nor the arrow that flies by day,  
<sup>6</sup> nor the plague that prowls in the darkness,  
nor the pestilence that destroys at noon.*

*<sup>14</sup> The LORD says,  
Because he clings to me, I will rescue him.  
I will protect him, because he acknowledges my name.  
<sup>15</sup> He will call on me, and I will answer him.  
I will be with him in distress.  
I will deliver him and I will honor him.  
<sup>16</sup> With long life I will satisfy him,  
and I will let him see my salvation.*

Many people my age and younger feel like we’re in a movie right now. We’ve seen many apocalyptic movies and TV shows. A terrible event happens and it changes everything. Sometimes there’s an asteroid strike, or an earthquake, or a tsunami or a zombie outbreak. The scariest ones are those in which the enemy is a virus. Earthquakes happen in relatively small areas. Destructive asteroid strikes seem unlikely and of course, zombies aren’t real. What’s scary about a pandemic is that it’s difficult to get away from. In fact, that’s not even what we’re trying to do right now. The scientists, the infectious disease experts tell us that many of us will become infected and for most of us it won’t feel much worse than a bad cold. What we’re trying to do with all this social distancing and hand washing is to prevent a large percentage of us from all getting sick at once because it would overwhelm our healthcare system. There is real concern that our doctors and nurses don’t have enough personal protective equipment, or enough ventilators, or even enough beds.

So we are told to stay at home. But it’s not foolproof is it? In our worst moments of fear it can feel like there is no safe place. How similar this pandemic is to how sin works. No human being

escapes what we call “original sin.” We inherit it from our parents. It really is like an infection. If I have COVID-19 it makes me unsafe for others. It affects how I feel and how I behave.

Original sin makes me evil. And so it makes me do evil things. I am not safe for others. I’m selfish, quick to anger, and greedy. I look out for myself and care only for what brings me pleasure or reduces pain. Just as I can’t escape original sin, I also can’t get away from doing sinful things. It’s certainly good to avoid temptation, but moving to an uninhabited island would not stop me from evil thoughts. It would not prevent me from rebelling against God or making a coconut or myself into a god.

That is the state of every human being. And that is the real cause of death. 4,825 people have died in Italy from the Coronavirus. Let me correct that. Billions of people have died because of sin. But there is a safe place. That place is with God. Almighty God who created us desires to be our refuge and fortress. He wants to cover us with his wings and to be our shield and armor. He wants to rescue us from plague, pestilence and pandemic.

Our safe place is with God because his truth protects us. The whole truth matters. All that God says is important. We must be aware of our sinful condition to appreciate the other great truth that God proclaims to us in his Word. He saved us through Jesus. You may remember the silly asteroid movie called “Armageddon” in which Bruce Willis sacrifices himself to save the world. If you’ve watched a few zombie movies they all have a scene in which a hero stays back as a sacrifice for the herd of zombies to allow time for the group to get to a safe place. We are in a moment of appropriate appreciation for the health care workers who may sacrifice themselves for the greater good.

Why are we so drawn to these stories? Why do so many movies and books have a character sacrificing himself for others? I’m convinced it’s because it reminds us of the great sacrifice that gave us a safe place. The only morally perfect human being who has ever lived suffered death on a cross, out of love for sinners. And because Jesus Christ is also true God that death accomplished much more than any other sacrifice in history. It redeemed all of humanity. All of us have been set free from sin and its consequences. That is the truth that protects us.

God is our safe place when we trust in this great truth. It’s through faith that God gives us all the good things he wants for us. If we take it all for granted our trust in that truth can weaken and even disappear entirely. Perhaps one of the good things that God will work out of this terrible time is that more of us will appreciate what really matters. Perhaps we will take more seriously that our faith and the faith of our loved ones need to be strengthened by regular contact with God’s Word and sacrament. I am truly sorry that we’re not assembling together at this time. I hope you know what an agonizing decision that was. I look forward to seeing you all again soon. I am also confident that God works through his Word when it is proclaimed on Youtube and in snail-mail.

God is our safe place as he answers our calls. He is listening to your prayers. And God doesn’t just listen. He answers. It may not always be what we want, but it’s what is best for us and that’s why he is our safe place. Call out to him! Think of how often you wash or sanitize your hands right now. How about we try folding our hands in prayer as often! We can say for sure that God always answers our prayers for salvation with a resounding yes! Your safe place is always with God. Dwell under the shadow of his wings. Amen.