

Stay safe! Stay well! Stay alive! Stay aware! Stay in love!

Message #3 Amidst Covid-19 Pandemic

Psalm 121, Matthew 25:31-45

Our mission is now completely clear!

We are on a decisive mission to make the world safe.

As the great Rev. Dr. Vernon Johns told one of his church deacons about the fight against evil racial segregation in Alabama, “When you see a fight—deacon—get into it.”

This is the kind of fight we are now in.

The fight is against a virus.

We are in a war of nerves with Covid-19!

A few hours after Dr. Johns advised his brave deacon, he took him to a segregated lunch counter— Johns sat down and ordered a ham sandwich, and when he was told by a pistol brandishing customer to pray over the ham sandwich he had ordered, Johns prayed,

“God...dammit.”

God damn the segregated ham sandwich.

That is how we need to be praying today: To damn and defeat the Covid 19 virus.

This is our mission.

This is your mission, whatever age you are.

Now!—it is a daunting and even dangerous mission.

To carry out this mission effectively, we must learn to live buoyantly under growing tension!

But how?

The answer is a paradox.

By that I mean:

On the one hand, because of this novel virus, which humanity doesn't have what is called "herd immunity" to—we need to see ourselves as living, locally and globally, in what the great *Chronicles of Narnia* author—C.S. Lewis—named “**enemy occupied territory**”.

Everywhere we go—except maybe our homes—and even some homes unfortunately—where the virus has already caused someone to be quarantined—EVERYWHERE seems to be ‘enemy occupied territory’.

And in a way, everywhere is enemy occupied territory.

These days—when you look all around you—and you see enemy occupied territory—you have a single choice—and that single choice is a campaign of quiet, mindful, effective sabotage.

Sabotage!

That word surprises you, doesn't it?

But that is how Jesus operated.

Some of you are familiar with the great African American spiritual,

“Ride on, King Jesus, no one can hinder me.”

Think of Jesus as a King who has been in exile for a long time!

But now Jesus—the exiled King—has arrived—in disguise—in enemy occupied territory and he is calling us all to join in his campaign of sabotage.

Each of us has a role to play in this campaign of sabotage.

The campaign begins behind closed doors!

It begins inside the secret chambers of your heart and your mind.

Where you pray: *God, lead me beside still waters.*

God, watch my coming in and my going out.”

God, You are my refuge and my strength, a very present help in trouble!”

And then from the secret chamber of your heart, you connect to a spiritual community—which is important—because it as though you were connecting by wireless internet to the power of God and to the collected power of all the courageous,

compassionate people who—whether they believed in God or not—have carried out themselves campaigns of sabotage to take back an inch, a foot, a half a mile, a mile of enemy occupied territory.

Each of you can accomplish this personal campaign of sabotage— first— by taking care of your own health and your own body.

You know this.

You deprive the enemy of territory by washing your hands persistently, especially before you eat and after you use the bathroom, not touching your face, keeping your physical distance of at least 6 feet from others, sanitizing surfaces, staying home if you are sick, going for a walk by yourself or another, sitting outside your residence by yourself, sheltering in place.

The very reason we are live streaming this service, and being careful around each other here in the sanctuary and church buildings, even as we continue to host child care, small 12 step groups and serve people who are homeless in this community.

At the same time, your sabotage campaign is a spiritual one.

And your main weapon of spiritual sabotage is love.

Because while everywhere is enemy occupied territory—everywhere is also a God filled world.

Meaning—you look on the entire world with love.

As the luminous and still living Iroquois/Haudenosaunee spiritual leader Chief Oren Lyons put it,

Even though you and I are in different boats, you in your boat and we in our canoe, we share the same River of Life.

Each of us is a original expression of the universe's love for itself.

Each of us is a potential expression of the Biblical insight that “God is love.”

So that when we look on others with love—creating spiritual and emotional intimacy with family, friends, the lonely, the vulnerable, sick—we are sabotaging the enemy.

Think of our need to love right now this way: You are driving a car, and you hear the emergency siren of an ambulance, everyone stops driving, and gives way for the ambulance race to its destination of need.

Well, this is an emergency, and we all have to stop other things we are doing and let love through.

Let love race to its destination of need.

Everywhere—in North America, South America, in Africa, in Europe, in Asia, in Australia—we are all in need of God’s emergency ambulance of love.

When we save other peoples lives, we save our own life.

When we save our own life, we save other peoples’ lives.

We are all a part of God’s planetary family.

As the great song writer, Michael Jackson put it, “We are the world.”

And we can’t keep pretending someone else is going to make a change.

So it’s time for you to make a choice—

—To lend your heart

—and lend your hand—to life.....

Now, I’m sure many of you, most of you, are experiencing some sleeplessness—worry—interludes of panic—despair—confusion, depression.

How many of you have awakened, startled by the thought: “*My God, I need another 24 pack of Costco toilet paper!*”

You would not be human if you weren’t totally upset.

I want to share a personal story with you that I hope will give you hope and added stamina.

About ten months ago, I was attacked by a viral infection.

It was very sudden. I woke up one day, and I wasn’t sure I could stand or walk without falling.

As a person who has always been very athletic, this was a terrible blow. And I quickly became worried and panicked.

“What is happening to me?”

For the next three months, I could do nothing about my illness except try desperately to find out what was wrong.

I underwent many tests—of my brain, my spine, my heart. I listened to the best neurologists, emergency room doctors, ENT specialists, surgeons, pain specialists suggest all sorts of possibilities, from stroke to the cerebellum to brain tumor, to spinal surgery, Parkinson’s, MS and on and on.

Finally, after 3 months of testing, I was told that a virus had attacked my inner ear and damaged some of the tiny organs that give humans the capacity for balance.

Then, three months into this, I was told there was no medicine, no cure for this and the only thing to do was aggressive physical therapy—what is called vestibular therapy—to teach the brain to recalibrate the flawed signals it is receiving from the damaged inner ear—and help me recover.

I have been doing this therapy aggressively and persistently for 7 months now.

And I am slowly but surely recovering.

Here are two things I have learned related to our collective global human health crisis.

We must be aggressive and persistent in our secret, spiritual and physical sabotage campaign.

No retreat!

No letting up!

No taking our eye off the target!

No delusion about the enemy and the territory the enemy occupies.

Secondly, and this is also perhaps a paradox: REST.

Yes! REST!

At its simplest level, Sleep. Sleep is a healing power.

And dreaming is your friend.

When you can, sleep until you wake up. Especially if you are waking up at night with dark or anxious thoughts. Even if you can’t fall completely asleep, lie in a state of rest.

You know, in the Bible, in the Old Testament, one of the promises that God makes to the people of the Torah, the Jewish people, is rest.

As God led the people of the Torah out of slavery and the plagues of Egypt, God said— *"My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."*

Thus says the LORD: *"Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls."*

Jesus said—*"Come to me, all **you** who are weary and burdened, and **I will give you rest.** Take my yoke upon **you** and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and **you will find rest** for your souls."*

As I conclude today, let me say that a central reason we worship is to listen to voices other than our own—and you have heard some of those voices today.

Thus we are enabled to hear words of wisdom we cannot speak to ourselves

And, then we worship in order to hear at an even deeper level, the voice of God, the One Who is Greater than the Sum of all Knowledge and Wisdom.

Knowing that God's love is unconditional will generate in us a faith that is unconditional.

In faithfulness, we do not live by conditional IF'S.....

We live by unconditional "no matter whats"

No matter what!— *when the waters roar and trouble*—the Lord of hosts is with us.

No matter what!—*when the mountains shake with the swelling thereof, the God of Jacob and Rachel is my refuge.*

Though *"my way is cloudy"*—no matter what!..... I will trust in You..

Yea, I walk through the valley of the shadow of death—no matter what—I will fear no evil....for Thou art with me."

Stay safe! Stay well! Stay alive! Stay aware! Stay in love— with your neighbor as with yourself—and with God. Amen!