**Into the Hands of a Gracious God**

Based on [John 20:19-31](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn20.19-31)

Preached for April 19, 2020

The Second Sunday of Easter ~ Quasimodo Geniti

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Christ is risen indeed, Alleluia.

We are living in a period of uncertainty, and as a society we seem to be handling it fairly well. But it is extremely interesting to me how the news and the government respond to such uncertainty. Myself...I find ways to occupy my time with family and projects at home. I expect most families do just that. But the news exists to bring news about big happenings; and the government exists to solve social problems. So it is interesting to see how they--the media and the government--respond to a novel situation.

Human beings want control, they want to be like God knowing and influencing all things. God does things his own way, but we want things done ours. We think this virus should end yesterday...God doesn’t...so we look for other gods to give us knowledge and control. We turn to science and the news to get knowledge; we turn to the government to take action. So my question is this...is there ever a problem that we can responsibly say is above our pay grade to solve? Can we say that a situation is so unpredictable, that there are so many factors and variables involved that the responsible thing to do would be to simply sit tight, take care of yourself and your own, and pray and trust the one true Authority to navigate us through? Or must we always turn to science and the government to do whatever they can?

Once, when King David sinned, his sin required consequences. So the Lord gave him three options. The consequence of his sin would be either three years of famine, three years of running from his enemies, or three days of a plague in the land. ***David chose the plague and 70,000 men died.*** He chose the plague saying “Please let us fall into *the Lord’s hands* because his mercies are great, but don’t let me fall into human hands.”

All this to say, in all things, including the present crisis, it isn’t a choice between doing something or doing nothing. It isn’t a choice between being responsively active or negligently passive. But it is a choice between trusting men and trusting God. How much of the scriptures, how many of the Psalms talk about waiting upon the Lord for deliverance. Now, if your neighbor lacks food and you have it, don’t trust that God will provide for him...go give him some food. That’s a simple problem that you have the means to fix. But I want you to consider this: when do human problems become so complex that we finally say “all my efforts and planning avail nothing”, I will sit tight in the face of the present evil, live peacefully, sing joyfully and wait upon God to navigate us through this?

The bible has a number of illustrations and sayings about the idolatry of worldly preparedness. The pharisees chronically wash their hands to remain clean, but neglect to love their neighbor. Jesus says that they are “straining a gnat while swallowing a camel”, I suppose a modern way to say it is that they are majoring in the minors. Elsewhere Jesus tells of a man who is evidently so active and prepared that he gathers up more grain than he has room to store. Rather than give some away, or finaly dedicate his time to love of God and neighbor, the man concludes that he will build even bigger barns so he can feel even more secure in this world. But God required of him his life, and so what good is all his preparations for this world, when he, or any of us, do not know when God will choose to take our life. Don’t get me wrong, I think it’s good to be responsible; but 24/7 news coverage of the coronavirus; 24/7 government planning and response to a pandemic that is by and large unpredictable has the capacity to tempt us to think that our salvation belongs in the hands of men.

We will never know how this pandemic will roll out until it does. In the meantime, are we allowed to relax, trust in God, and not worry about whether we’ve done enough. That’s what it means to live in the grace of God...to live under the gospel, rather than the law. To live under the law is to believe that your ability to survive, physically or spiritually, temporally or eternally, is somewhat dependent on your ability, your choices, your preparedness, your intelligence, your ambition, etc. But the Gospel says that your salvation is entirely up to God. And God sent his Son, Jesus Christ to die on the cross so that all people might be saved. And this gospel is preached so that, those who hear it, believe it, internalize and trust it, certainly have eternal life. And neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers nor height nor depth, [nor isolation nor pandemic] nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Gospel reading today has the disciples holed up in a room and they were under the law. They were afraid of the Jews, because they thought that they would suffer Jesus' fate at their hands. It was this fear that caused Peter to deny Jesus three times. What cowards, to deny their master and friend to save their own skin. But then Jesus, risen from the dead in the body, enters through locked doors to approach them. And you can imagine their fear. They feared the punishment of the Jews, but now the stakes got infinitely higher. Now, they are standing in the presence of their master and friend and God, who, when things got scary they fled and left him to be arrested, beaten, and crucified. The guilt of knowing you hurt someone is heavy. Having to face the person you wronged is excruciating. Having to face the person you wronged, knowing he has the power to utterly destroy you forever would be absolutely terrifying.

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God...unless that God comes in peace. So Jesus, risen from the dead, came to stand before them in the flesh. And what he didn’t say to them is as important as what he said. He didn’t say…”I know what you’ve done.” He didn’t say, “Now you’re going to get it.” He didn’t say, “How could you have abandoned me like that.” He didn’t say, “You don’t love me, so why should I lift a forgive you?” No. He said, “Peace be with you.” He was the one who was sinned against by them; he had every reason and every ability to destroy them for it, but instead he comes to them in peace and a reason to rejoice.

In the midst of our present troubles we can know that we have a gracious God, and a merciful saviour. Have we washed our hands enough? Have we social distanced enough? Have I stored up enough goods? Have I kept informed enough? In the words of St. Paul, “Each person should be convinced in his own mind.” And in the words of David, “Trust in the Lord, and lean not on your own understanding.”

It is wonderful for us to be able to rest assured that it is all in God’s hands anyway. There are many uncertainties in this life, but this is certain...God is in control, and God loves humanity and he is always working for the Good of those who trust Him. So rejoice, be glad. You have a God that has the whole world in His hands, and he’s not out to harm you, he sent his son into the world to give you a peace that passes human understanding.