

Psalm 25:15; 27:4-6

During these dark days in which the virus has been taking over the world, nothing else seems to matter. There is no other news. Except perhaps for the weather. Even the race for the White House has taken a back seat.

It was that way on 9/11. Nothing else mattered except what happened on that day. The difference then is that people flocked to the church. Houses of worship were full the next Sunday and for a little while after. But now many churches are compelled to close their doors.

And even as we gather for worship today, it is difficult for us to put things out of mind completely. As we fix our eyes on Jesus, we keep an eye out for news of the virus. Some of the measures we are taking here even lend to this. The common cup is not being offered. No handshaking. No close contact. How are we supposed to clear our minds and focus on the *one thing needful*?

My friends, our Introit for today can help us. "*My eyes are ever toward the Lord,*" writes the psalmist David, "*for He will pluck my feet out of the net.*" He continues, "*For He will hide me in His shelter in the day of trouble; He will conceal me under the cover of His tent.*"

David was being pursued, not by a virus, but by an enemy. When King Saul was after him to put him to death, how difficult it would have been for David to focus on anything but that! Yet, where are his eyes? Not on those seeking his life. "*My eyes,*" he says, "*are ever toward the Lord.*"

Five hundred years before David, God's people would have said the same thing. God unleashed poisonous snakes among them because they were acting wickedly. It was like a pandemic. People were bit. People were dying. The serpents were everywhere. Panic was setting in. Nothing else mattered except the crisis around them. Then God told Moses to erect a bronze snake and put it up high on a pole, and everyone who fixed their eyes on this sign from God was saved. "*My eyes,*" they would have cried, "*are ever toward the Lord!*"

We know, for the Scriptures teach, that *all things work out for good for those who love God*. Even fiery serpents. Even being pursued by King Saul. Even a pandemic caused by a virus. God has a merciful purpose in everything He does.

Have we been taking our eyes off the Lord? Have we been fixing our eyes, not on Jesus, but on everything but Jesus? Have we been like the man born blind (in our Gospel reading), not seeing Jesus at all? Jesus came to him and allowed him to see. Not just the world around him. Now he truly saw Jesus and he worshiped Him. Perhaps God is using this virus crisis to turn our eyes back to Him.

This may seem to be counterproductive. When a crisis comes, the temptation is to focus on it and not on the Lord. But God's ways are not our ways. He knows what He is doing. Look at David. The more troubled his life, the more he turned to the Lord.

This is faith. Faith needs trials and temptations, or it will die. And so God sends these to us. Not to drive us to despair. To turn our eyes back to Him; back to His promises. "*He will hide me in*

His shelter,” says David, *“in the day of trouble...He will conceal me under the cover of His tent...He will pluck my feet out of the net.”* God did this for David. Not just once, or twice, but always. He will do it also for you.

There is so much that is unknown these days. How long the virus will last. If our economy will come back. How many more will die. Nothing is unknown to God. We need to be responsible in times like these, but we need not panic. Not now, not ever. This is when faith takes over. God’s promises in our Introit are for days that are evil and troubling, when His people are in the midst of a crisis. His promises are for the very thing you are enduring right now.

I’m not sure if we should continue to gather here for worship while the virus is escalating. But today you are here. Today this Gospel is for you; for your comfort and assurance. Today Jesus’ body and blood are for you.

He endured days far worse and far more dark than these. He endured the darkness of the cross; the darkness of hell itself. This virus is not hell on earth, for through it all, God has not turned His face away from you, nor will He. This virus is not a punishment of God upon you. Jesus was already punished for your sins and mine. Be assured, completely assured that there is no sin in your life which is not covered by the blood of Jesus, and which, therefore, is incurring God’s wrath against you. All your sins are forgiven. Everyone of you is forgiven. Remember your baptism into Christ. That precious bath extinguished the fire of God’s wrath. And that will never change.

For as long as this virus continues, God’s promises will continue to be your source of strength and hope. For as long as you have breath in your body, He will continue to care for you. He invites you, therefore, to say with David, *“My eyes are ever toward the Lord!”* Amen.