

Now Is the Time

2 Corinthians 5:20b – 6:10

Ash Wednesday 2021

Introduction

Lent is a season of returning to the Lord. This is especially true this year, as last year we were forced to stay away. If you remember, the lockdown hit just two weeks into the Lenten season. It wasn't safe to come together, so we were told we must do our worship on-line. What I think most people learned was, while this was the best substitute we had, it isn't that good. It's maybe one step above watching a service on TV. Corporate worship is experiential. If you're not experiencing it, you aren't getting the full benefit of it. All talk of virtual reality must bear in mind that the definition of "virtual" is "not real". While people liked to say (quite frequently) "We're in this together", the truth is we aren't. Everyone's situation is different. Being on the same computer screen doesn't mean we're together. Some don't have access to a computer. People in some nursing homes are confined to their room with a TV for company—a TV that only gets local channels. They are allowed out only to shower. They are not just deprived of visitors but cannot interact with other residents. Am I saying we should just do away with all the precautions and let the chips fall where they may? No, what I'm saying is before we embrace this as the "new normal," we must see it for what it is, making the best of a bad situation, and be aware of all the effects and ramifications of our actions.

Fallen

How did we get into this mess? The evidence is strong that the virus was made in a laboratory in China. But I'm not blaming it on the Chinese. Whether this virus was man-made or naturally occurring, intentionally or accidentally released, the ultimate cause is the same. It is sin. Sickness and death were both results of the fall. All the suffering of mankind is because we sinned. This is nothing new. As we read in ***Ecclesiastes 1:9***, *there is nothing new under the sun*.

A Picture of Sin

This whole thing is not just symptomatic of our fallen status, but symbolic as well. Because God is holy, sin separates us from Him. We would burn up if we were to get close to His holiness. In the same way, we are told to stay safe from the virus; we must stay away from each other. Just as we are spiritually distant from God, we are to be socially distant from others. However, this social distancing leads to social isolation. Some people are not helping others because it's "not safe." Some service companies are having their customers do their own service now. If you get stuck, they'll walk you through it online or on the phone.

Independent Faith

Of course, this has emphasized the fact that faith is an individual matter. After all, the creeds say, "I believe", not "we believe." We believe individually; we can pray individually; we can read the Bible individually. So, we have access to one of the means of grace individually. But there's a difference

between having an individual faith and an independent faith. While we can get by on our own, for a time, we need each other for the long haul. We're not independent in our faith.

The Call to Return

So, the call to return to the Lord is for us as individuals and for us as the body of Christ. Wherever we are, whatever we're doing, the call to return has come. The time is now. It's time to return to the Lord. We return to Him through Christ. He who knew no sin and was made sin makes us the righteousness of God. We wear these ashes as a symbol of our penitence, our desire to return to the Lord. He gives us His grace through Word and Sacrament to make the trip back. **NOW IS THE TIME. Now** is the day of salvation. **RETURN TO THE LORD.**

*And the peace of God,
Which passes all understanding,
Will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
