

Remedy for the World's Problems

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

Luke 24:45-49

Ten years from now, as you look back, what are you going to tell your children and grandchildren who were not old enough to remember COVID-19 and Shelter at Home? What kind of story might you tell them? Will you tell about the fear people felt at the possibility of coming down with it? Will you emphasize the hardship many people went through? The food lines? The people who lost jobs and businesses that went broke? Will you tell an inspiring story of courage? Of the kindness neighbors showed to help each other out? Will you explain the change in technology? How Zoom used to mean a car going fast, and how not showing up in-person at school once would have got you a detention? How will you explain COVID-19 to people who will have never experienced it? How will you finish this sentence: "Back before the Pandemic we used to..."?

How do you view the Pandemic right now? Certainly, as a tragedy. Something you wish never had to be. Perhaps as a nightmare that you wish you could wake up from and it would be all gone. Perhaps something that was not supposed to happen. A mistake or as the result of some people's negligence in both its origin and its spread across the globe?

How is it part of God's story? Do we ever see it that way? Should we?

It sure looks to me that our view of COVID19 is that it's (1) a mistake. Something not planned by God. But something that He has to deal with and correct. Some people might think that this (2) proves

that God doesn't exist if things like this happen. Others think our troubles prove that (3) God's just barely got control of things.

There IS another option. The 4th option is that God has different and BIGGER plans.

We have the idea that God's top priority *MUST* be dealing with and correcting mistakes like covid. That's a certainty to us.

Yes, it's true, we know from the Bible that God really is NOT Ok with things like sickness, hunger, injustice, and harming one another. God is real clear. He didn't create and doesn't want those things. Along with a host of other natural disasters, personal, and social problems. Just check the newsfeed to find the problem dujour. The list of sicknesses, and shootings, and accidents never ends.

Those things are really, really *IMPORTANT TO US*. We talk about them. Blog about them. People make big money on TV talk, talk, talk, talking about our problems. And we assume God *must* have these same problems on the top of *His* list of things He must fix that day.

Could it be – just think about this – could it be that we've got it wrong? Could it be that God is willing to allow things like covid to continue because He's got BIGGER, BETTER plans?



Have you ever played the game “Whack-A-Mole”? The idea is that a mechanical mole pops it's head up out of a hole and you whack it. Simple as that. There's no order to which hole the critter pops out of next. First here, then there. And the speed at which they stick their heads out goes faster and faster. You just keep whacking as fast as you can. You know what the problems is? You never get rid of the mole. You just whack at one problem after another after another, and never get anywhere.

We expect God to play whack-a-mole. God's plan and purpose for this world - and for your personal life-, however, is not to just whack at the next problem that pops up. God's plan and purpose is much

BIGGER, much BETTER – over-arching, and long-term. This is what the disciples needed to learn. This is what Jesus taught them when He came to them in the evening of Easter Sunday.

On Easter Sunday, before the disciples had personally met Jesus alive again, they were dejected. Their world had been shattered. Their hopes were in the dumpster. They saw Jesus' suffering and death on the cross as completely awful. A mistake.

They viewed what was going on in their lives, just like we today view this pandemic -- a mistake. Something so bad that God's just got to fix for us. That was their "Diagnosis the sickness" – to use our medical / pandemic words today. That was their view of their biggest problems.

Their lives WERE a mess! They had the Romans in power bringing their oppression. High taxes. Poverty. They were the victims of brutal racism from the Romans. Their fellow countrymen were forced to serve like slaves. Many were *crucified!* Their religion and culture were disrespected. It was awful! Are those things God is concerned about? Yes, absolutely. God's not OK with any of that.

Then, Jesus came on the scene. He healed the sick. Raised the dead. Fed the hungry. Taught a way of love and grace. Without a doubt God's power was on Him. And then Jesus ended up falsely condemned, convicted on trumped up charges, crucified like the worst of criminals, dead, and in a tomb.

It looked to them like this was all a mistake! Where was God in any of this?! Why didn't God fix this mess like they thought He should?!

Do you see how much like them we are today? We fix our eyes so much on our early problems, on the tragedies and heartaches we go through, that when things don't turn out how we expect, then we end up blaming God. How faithless! How arrogant!

What the disciples missed was that as awful as Jesus' suffering and death were, these were all part of God's plan from the beginning. God was still at work! God was still in control! God was working to save the world!



So Jesus, in great love and patience for His disciples, came to them on Easter Sunday evening. He showed them His hands and His feet. It's really Him – the crucified One – who is alive, standing there. He ate with them, proving He is real! He calmed their fears: *"Peace be with you,"* He said. (On the screens is an ancient painting picturing this event).

Isn't it wonderful that Christ is so loving and patient with us that He puts up with us when we get it wrong? He doesn't ream us out or call us "knuckleheads."

Then Jesus shared with His disciples HIS diagnosis of the all the problems we face in our lives. He opened their minds to understand God's BIGGER and BETTER plan for *your* life, and for *all* of human history! Jesus said to His disciples: ***"...Everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,' ..."***

God's got a bigger plan! He's *never* lost control. He works His plan of saving you IN SPITE OF and even THROUGH all the conflicts and hurts of our lives!

God's plan and purpose is over-arching. His plan began at the beginning. He created everything in 6 days, and after creating man and woman in the image of the Triune God, everything was *very* good. When the perfect creation was ruined by the Fall into sin, we see God move into action. He forgives them. Yes, there were curses, which are residual effects of sin, and even though life on earth will be full of problems now, still God promises a Savior to come!

In God's amazing plan, God allows problems *so important to us*, to continue so that He can work out His plan of saving people in His timing. God doesn't just whack at our problems.

God is not OK with slavery, but allowed His people to go through 430 *YEARS* of slavery to protect His people. They were sheltered by living withing mighty Egypt so that they were not wiped out, and God's promise to bring a Savior would ultimately happen. Just think of that – 430 years of suffering! I'm sure the people prayed, "God, end this slavery, this problem now." God had a different perspective, a better diagnosis, for our eternal good.

He led them out of Egypt and showed His might and His overwhelming love. Then over 800 years there were leaders and kings over the People – most of those leaders were just horrible! There were cowards, and adulterers, prostitutes, and murders. Some had anger problems, lust problems, greed problems. Many didn't even follow God. Those were awful problems, but through them all God still worked to carry out His plan to save all people of all time.

We have about 40 people of this congregation reading through the Bible together this year. This past week we learned that things for the people long ago would get so bad, they would turn so far away from God, that He would send a powerful enemy nation who would conquer and destroy the whole country, take all the wealth and the people from their homes to the land of Babylon. And then there is this obscure, goofy verse in the Bible that says:

²⁷ And in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, Evil-merodach king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, graciously freed Jehoiachin king of Judah from prison. ²⁸ And he spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat above the seats of the kings who were with him in Babylon. ²⁹ So Jehoiachin put off his prison garments. And every day of his life he dined regularly at the king's table, ³⁰ and for his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by the king, according to his daily needs, as long as he lived.

So Jehoiachin, who *would have been king* had he still been in Jerusalem, spent 37 years in prison. 37 years! How would you like to spend 37 *YEARS* in prison? If you were him, would you have been praying for God to fix that problem right away? I bet you would!

Then, a new king in Babylon takes the throne, and on what sounds like just a whim, Jehoiachin is set free, and honored. And

through this event, God keeps alive His promise of a great King of kings to come who is a descendant of King David, Jesus, our Savior. God works out His plan in some mysterious ways! He never wastes a problem!

Then in Jesus' life, the High Priests who should be for Him, are corrupt and hate Jesus and condemn Him to death. The governor, Pilate, who *should* have given justice, instead is a people-pleaser and sends Jesus to a cross. And through it all, God's plan prevails. God's plan will ALWAYS prevail. God is still at work today, in our lives, for a Bigger, Better plan than we can grasp. God's in control. Always. He's GOT this!

Today's Gospel reading tells us that Jesus came to His disciples Easter night. Their eyes were fixed on their life problems. Jesus lifted their eyes up to see God's eternal perspective.

Our problems are real, for sure. Our greatest problem, the root of all our problems, is that you choose yourself before others, rely on yourself before God, do what feels good to you instead of what God asks to show love to others. Its sin. A fractured relationship with the One who made you, loves you, and saves you.

The cure, Jesus tells us, is that ***Repentance and forgiveness of sins be proclaimed in His name.*** Repentance simply put is: turning *away* from you and turning TO God. Turning away from loving yourself, thinking about yourself, relying on yourself alone. Turning to loving God, trusting Him, following Him. Looking to Him for forgiveness, heaven to come, and all good things now.

This is ***THE REAL, ULTIMATE CURE*** that you and I need. And this cure centers in what Jesus did for you when He died on the cross to pay with His life for your sins. And He rose back to life on Easter morning to guarantee death is not the final word over you!

Recently I saw a man in his 60's or 70's who has been color blind all his life. His family gave him a pair of En-chroma glasses – like special sunglasses. He put them on and he was immediately reduced to tears. Because for the first time in his life he saw the world in color. He never knew how beautiful the world around him was. It was

amazing to see everything in a new way, in the way its supposed to be seen.

That's what Jesus did to the disciples. He ***“opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.”*** Finally, they got it! God's grace and good plan is bigger and better than they EVER knew before. It blew their minds! Even though everything looked like it was falling apart, like their problems were pointless, and like God was absent, suddenly, they saw God's grace at work. Suddenly God's amazing love was overwhelming to them. God had answered their prayers in ways so, so much better!

We've seen lately that vaccines have been developed for covid19, and now our country is getting it out to people – delivering the treatment. In downtown Cleveland, the Wolstein Center is a massive site to treat thousands and thousands of people.

God has opened our eyes to see that He has given us what we really need! ***“Forgiveness and repentance of sins in the name of Jesus.”*** He has cured the root of all our life's problems, given us forgiveness, a new relationship with God that will last into heaven forever. This is God's gift to YOU, and to all people. It's what all people need!

How is this treatment delivered? Through you and me. Jesus said, ***“repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”*** It's we who personally know this grace, who deliver this to others who also need Him so desperately.

Notice Jesus said, ***“beginning from Jerusalem.”*** Question: where were the disciples when Jesus said this to them? (in Jerusalem). For you and me this means: start where your feet touch the ground. Start with neighbors and friends, and relatives, and co-workers.

Friends, out of all the things a church can do and be – this is still our main focus! This is why God has us here! This is why St. Paul Lutheran Church of Amherst, Ohio exists. To proclaim JESUS – God's plan of love and redemption. He bought us back through His life, death on the cross and resurrection! This is what we are about.

Those of you who have been around for a while will remember a very popular television show that ran from 1966-1973. It began with a

rather dapper looking gentlemen stepping into a phone booth or a closet. He pushed the “play” button on a small tape recorder and heard, “Good morning, Mr. Phelps.” The voice on the tape would then describe what Jim Phelps was being asked to do. It was always important and it was always dangerous. Once the explanation was complete, the voice would say, “This tape will self-destruct in five seconds. Good luck, Jim.”

Jim Phelps’ mission was always important and always dangerous. What God has called us to do is infinitely more important! And it can also be dangerous. For the last two thousand years untold numbers of Christians have been laying down their lives while accomplishing their mission. But has that stopped the spread of the gospel? It has not! Why? Because Jesus promised us God’s power. He told His disciples, ***“I am sending the promise of my Father upon you.”*** ***“You will be “clothed with power from on high.”*** This promise is for you and me. There will NEVER be any luck involved in your mission.”

Many times in life, we are left to trust by faith that God is at work, even when it may not look like it. God is *always* at work to grow your faith, to keep you in faith, and to prepare you to continue the work He left for us, to proclaim that Gospel.

He doesn’t waste anything. And that includes this time in our lives. Even though it may seem that this pandemic is a mistake, that God has forgotten us, or that He is punishing us, this is not the case. Look back to His story played out in the Scriptures. See how He has used the difficult times His people suffered for their future good.

Ten years from now we will have a story to tell. We can explain how the Pandemic of 2020 changed our lives for now and forever. We can reminisce what life was like before it came and how much different it is after. But we have a story to tell that God is always ruling, always loving, always guiding, forgiving us always. Amen.