

Nbr. 20 – Holy Week, 2020

Do not be afraid

Do not underestimate anxiety these days. You might think boredom is a big problem for people right now, or close quarters. Well, don't discount those. But don't underestimate anxiety.

People are anxious about finances . . . about when they can get back to church . . . about whether THEY will contract COVID-19. Standard securities are wavering. Idols are toppling. So people become anxious, if not outright fearful.

"Don't be afraid," said the angel (Mt. 28:5).

"Don't be afraid," said Jesus (Mt. 28:10).

After a week of the most fearsome things – betrayal and denial of God's own Son, darkness at noon, earthquake, and the anguished cry "My God, My God . . .", Easter tells us: do not be afraid.

The women departed from the tomb with "fear and great joy" (Mt. 28:8). These emotions can coexist in the hearts of saints who are also sinners.

The message for fearful sinners is that Jesus died and rose for us. He was crucified, the angel said, but He is not here. He is risen.

See? WOW! Our message for sinners is that God can be loved – even trusted – as well as feared.

Only Jesus can make this so. And He has! Put to death for our sins, He was raised for our justification (Romans 4:25). Don't be afraid.

Gate Post Special Holy Week Issue

This *Gate Post* contains a devotional page for each day this week, plus Easter Sunday. Please encourage people to share this issue just as widely as they can, also with unchurched people they know. They can add their own words of greeting and encouragement as they forward this link:

<http://www.cidlcms.org/HolyWeekGatePost.4.2020.pdf>

C-WOWs and Circuit Visitors, please **FORWARD** the present Holy Week *See? WOW!* to your Circuit's congregations and church workers. Thanks very much!

CID Facebook Page

The page just launched! This week it offers daily devotions: the ones in the special *Gate Post*, plus another set by Chaplain Jeff Harter, CID Human Care Committee chairman. Oh, and take a peek on the Facebook page at how kids all over CID are starting to tell Bible stories to Mr. Rodgers – Trip Rodgers! To find this page, search for "Central Illinois District-LCMS" on Facebook.

Reach out with cards and calls

(I have Parish Nurse Kim Meyer, another member of the Human Care Committee, to thank for the germ of this idea. It can work especially well if, like hers, your church already has a group that regularly sends out birthday or bereavement cards. You might have to add a few more to such a group.)

Go back through your records of visitors at church. Who has attended a baptism or confirmation, wedding or funeral, over the last few months?

Send each of these people a card, or, alternatively, a short handwritten note. Let them know that someone is thinking about them at Easter time, 2020 – quite likely the oddest and most disconcerting Easter in their memory. And let them know how they can reach someone at your church, if they would like to talk.



Some of these people will have their own church homes, yet they will probably be glad you remembered them. No sheep-stealing here! But some of your recent visitors are unchurched . . .

Opportunity for the Gospel

A survey in the U.S. during the last week of March showed that 44% see “the global coronavirus pandemic and economic meltdown” as “a wake-up call for us to turn back to faith in God.” One out of four who identify as “secular” report that they see this as a wake-up call, too.

In the same poll, 22% of the non-Christians surveyed said they are now reading the Bible and listening to Christian material online because of the crisis. They are also having more spiritual conversations. And 38% of Jewish Americans surveyed say that they are listening to such things as Christian sermons on the internet.

Especially younger non-Christians are turning to the Bible and to Christian teaching. This is so for 28% of those ages 18 to 29, and 36% of those from 30 to 40.

This Holy Week and Easter, not only can we make church services, Bible classes, and devotional materials available digitally in one way or another; we can also encourage church members vigorously to recommend the resources to others. Let’s do so!

The good news, functionally for us in this situation, is that you don’t have to do a lot of “packaging” for THE Good News about Jesus to reach the notice of people. For many folks who participated in the survey described above, it would not have crossed their minds to visit, say, a church website only a few weeks ago. They’re visiting now.

And don’t overlook your own congregation’s inactive members. They too might be connecting with the church online, like never

before. Do not forget them when making attempts to keep tabs on church members.

Keep track of the new CID Facebook page.

Resources for bereavement are in the works as this is being written, and they will be readily sharable.

Worth Considering:

Outsized Claims?

“What are you doing, Billy?” Dad asked. Billy answered: “I’m drawing a picture of God.” “But Billy,” Dad said, “no one knows what God looks like.” Billy shrugged, “They’ll know now.”

Preachers can use this story to proclaim the Incarnation. Whoever has seen Christ has seen God.

Consider a more pedestrian point at the moment, though. As with Billy, people want to make outsized claims for their actions.

One way of doing this is to clothe our ordinary activities with the lingo of respectable churchiness, if not the trappings of theological theory. Billy couldn’t be drawing simply because it was fun, or to exercise his imagination. No, he was showing God to the world.

I have noticed this sort of tendency in our present difficult times. If Elders make telephone calls to the appropriate people, just to check in and maybe pray with them, there can be a tendency to depict this activity as the work of “lay shepherds.” Yet they are simply doing what Elders do.

A Christian family, or extended family, may help others who live nearby by running errands or purchasing food. They might tell people, for example, “Jesus loves you, and I do too.” I suppose some would want to start calling them a “missional community.” But they are being good neighbors.

God’s royal priests (1 Peter 2:9) take Him seriously, offer spiritual sacrifices, and speak of Him. Have we become so secular-minded that the only place we can conceive of people doing these



See? **WOW!** News and Encouragement for CID **Circuit Witness & Outreach Workers**

things is at church? Do we have to resort to new,
high-falutin' titles to make such acts respectable?

Christians are "little Christs," as Luther put
it. No outsized claims need be made.

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Circuit Witness and Outreach Workers