

Hello church!

Amidst this virus, it only makes sense that this week talk about giving up fear in our Lenten sermon series.

Some of us have stockpiled groceries and supplies this week. Some of us have purchased travel insurance on our future trips. Some have worn masks or stayed indoors. As COVID-19 brings school closures and city shut-downs (church included!), we begin to collectively worry that our immune systems aren't up to snuff. We constantly sanitize our hands and look suspiciously on anyone that coughs. It's coming closer.

When something moves closer, it invokes a different reaction than when it is at a distance. When panic happens across the globe perhaps we feel bad, but that's "over there." Now that it has drawn nearer, our gut instinct is to protect ourselves and the ones we love.

Let's look at how God moves closer to the Hebrews. At the burning bush, he tells Moses:

"⁷ Then the LORD said, "I have seen the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings,⁸ and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.⁹ The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them.¹⁰ So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." (Ex. 3:7-9)

Each of the phrases Yahweh chooses to explain his nearness shows a closeness that is otherwise missed at first reading. First, he *sees* the misery of his people. To see something one does not have to be very close. We can "see" people suffering across the world through social media and news outlets. There might be a jolt of sadness but then we can quickly move on without giving it much thought.

But then God says "I have heard their cry." Think about when you are at a baseball stadium. It's one thing to hear the sound of the cheering crowd, but when you can hear the crack of the bat that means that you are closer to the action. That means you are a direct observer, closer than just seeing but now hearing.

Then God comes a bit closer and says "I know their sufferings." That means he is right there with them.

He goes on to say: "I have come down." He's here! He has left the heavenly realms to deliver us, right? Read on:

“So come, I will send you.”

God knows the cries of his people. He has seen it and heard it. He comes closer with each step. But he has sent us to be bearers of his glory. And when something moves closer, it invokes a different reaction than when it is at a distance.

What am I saying here? I’m not by any means saying be unwise by holding strangers’ hands in the bathroom. I’m simply saying recognize what happens when something draws near. For us, perhaps this virus has given us a new outlook on our brothers and sisters around the world who have to deal with illness and disease and unclean water everyday of their lives. Perhaps we have a little taste of their lives as we “draw nearer” to them in spirit. Perhaps next time we “hear the cries of our people,” we are able to go and be the hands and feet of Jesus.

For God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power, love, and sound mind.

So live in that sound mind by washing your hands and taking precautions, but also give up fear this lent and act out of the love of our Father.

Go in peace,
Jamie