

You are the Salt of the Earth! 90th Anniversary Worship Service

Proverbs 16:9, Matthew 5:13-16

Welcome to Asbury worship service this morning. We are going through a difficult time and this Covid-19 situation makes us depressed, worried, and anxious. During the week, Juhee and I went grocery shopping and we found several people wearing masks and gloves. More interestingly, people tended to avoid other people. In fact, I also found myself feeling uncomfortable around other people. Nowadays, many people may feel that going into a grocery store is like going into a dangerous biohazard zone. But we don't have to feel that way. According to a data, "the majority of people with Covid-19 only suffer mild symptoms, then recover."¹ There is a much higher chance that we will survive even if we get Covid-19. We have to be careful but we don't have to be somber, depressed and worried all the time.

We may not be able to change the current situation, but we can change the way we think about it. And how we think determines how we handle the stress and anxiety. We can still be serene, peaceful and even grateful amid of this challenging time.

Do you remember "the gratitude challenge" we did during the season of Thanksgiving? Each day, we focused on finding things or people we're grateful to have in our life, and then we would express our gratitude for them. I think this simple exercise can increase our feeling of gratitude and happiness in life at this time of fear and anxiety.

What are you grateful for in the midst of this difficult situation? I am grateful that I still have enough toilet paper. If you need a roll of toilet paper, you know my number.

I am grateful that we can still have online worship service, though we can't have inperson gatherings. I am grateful for the excellent leaders of Asbury UMC who prudently and wisely are handling the new challenge we are facing. I am grateful for the wonderful people of Asbury UMC who love each other and support one another in love and prayer. And most importantly, I am grateful for our 90th church anniversary. "Happy Anniversary!" God has filled our lives with many things and people to be grateful for! So try to find what you are grateful for and give thanks to God.

God directs the steps!

This unexpected situation reminds me of the wisdom of Proverbs. "The human mind plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps." (Proverbs 16:9) Even a few week ago, we had a wonderful plan to have our 90th church anniversary with our district superintendent, Dr. Andrew Foster. Of course, he is with us in a different way, but all our plans had to be changed. "Our 90 crosses and 90 graces project" needs to be postponed until this unexpected storm passes. Juhee's family and my mother had planned to visit us, but it had to be canceled. Life does not always go as we plan and we must accept it as a part of our lives.

Along with the incredible technological advancements and economic expansions, we, human beings, often feel that we can do anything and control the fate of humanity. We have forgotten that we are only mortal and in fact, we live under God's mercy and grace. I hope that we can learn something from this crisis and be humble before God.

Is Church Essential or non-essential?

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/20/health/covid-19-recovery-rates-intl/index.html>

As I shared in my last sermon, this crisis reveals the fragility of our lives and socioeconomic systems. But it also reveals how our society thinks of church too. Many state governors have issued shelter in place orders. During this state lockdown, all non-essential businesses are to be closed. What kept bothering me throughout the week is that the church and worship services are regarded as non-essential businesses or activities. Interestingly, liquor stores are considered to be an essential business and they can stay open even during the lockdown order. Isn't it interesting that liquor stores are essential business? The reason why liquor stores are regarded as an essential business is that those who are dependent on alcohol may die from alcohol withdrawal if they can't get alcohol. That's why liquor stores can stay open... to save some people. Since alcohol saves some people's lives, it's considered essential but what about the church?

You are the salt of the earth!

Jesus says "you are the salt of the earth!" Salt has many functions such as flavoring and preserving food. Salt plays a crucial role in maintaining our health. Have you ever fasted? How long did you fast? Three days? Fifteen days? Forty days? For me, it was a week. I fasted for a week not because I was a faithful pastor but because I made a wrong deal with God. When I first came to the United States to study, I needed to obtain a certain score on the TOFEL, which is an English proficiency exam taken by international students. I studied very hard but it was really difficult to get the score that I needed.

I was desperate so I offered God my terms in a short prayer, "God, I will fast for a week if you help me to get a score above 600." Then, I completely forgot about it. Yes. I even forgot the fact that I had made a deal with God. But God blessed me anyway, giving me a score better than what I had expected. I was elated, that is, until I remembered my deal with God.

A deal was a deal. So I fasted for a week. It was in the middle of Korean New Year celebration when every family gathers together and enjoys delicious food. But I stayed at my home alone and only drank bottled water for a week.

When I started fasting, my father who had many experiences of fasting, advised me that I should eat a little bit of salt every day. But as a young and stubborn son, I wanted to do a perfect fasting so I ignored my father's words. For the first three days, I was just hungry but fine. But after four days, I started to have a headache, fatigue, sweating and feeling cold even though my room was about 86 degree. I struggled with low blood sodium symptoms. When I called my father, he told me again, "You should eat salt" and this time, I followed his word. When I put a little bit of salt in my mouth, just like a magic, all those symptoms instantly disappeared. Then, I knew what Jesus meant by "you are the salt of the earth!" It is essential for life. It saves life.

Church is not optional. The church is essential for the world and our society. Of course, the ways we can be salt for the world are diverse. During this time, practicing social distance is a way of saving lives and the church needs to do it. But at the same time, we need to think of how Asbury can be life-saving salt for our neighbors.

The Asbury Outreach team is interested in sewing facial masks for hospitals and people who need them. If you are sewers or know how to sew, and would like to participate in this project, please let us know. Also, making phone calls or texting to your friends and neighbors to check-in could be a way to alleviate people's anxiety and the feelings of isolation.

What else can we do? With faith in God's providential care, maybe we can stop panic buying and stockpiling toilet paper and other goods. Along with social distancing, there are many things we can practice to be salt for the world in the midst of this unexpected Covid-19 crisis. Andrea Dunn, one of the most creative Asbury church members, has started to share video of

making Daily DIY & Difuser on her Facebook. I think this is also a good idea for helping others to relieve their stress and anxiety from being overly focused on the unseen virus. Try to be creative and just share the small light that is in you. This will make a difference in a very dark time for many people.

We are the church on the move!

This Covid-19 situation forces us to remember that the church is not the building but the people. You are the church! We are the church! We are the church on the move! This Covid-19 forces us to move beyond the church building. You must remember how the early Christian church in Jerusalem was persecuted and how those who had been scattered spread the gospel. Maybe this is a time that we are forced to be scattered. Now, your living room becomes a church. Your time with a family and friends becomes the opportunity for mission. Now, we are experiencing a new way of being a church in this exceptional moment in history.

I am sure that we will soon gather at our beautiful church building again. But until we meet again, let us try to be the church where we are.

Think of how you can do Sunday school in your living room with your kids. Think of how your dining table can turn to a table of Bible study. Think of how we can still be connected in prayer and life during this time of social distancing. When we come back together, bring new insights so that Asbury UMC can be a new church.

A philosopher says, "What Doesn't Kill You Makes You Stronger." And we know that Covid-19 will not and cannot destroy the church because the foundation of Asbury is the unshakable love of Christ for us! We will be stronger by going through this challenging situation.

Don't fear, my friends. God be with you till we meet again. Be salt and light where you are. Continue to share the gospel and make the history of Asbury 100 and 200 years! God bless you all! Amen.