

Dear Leominster Church Family...Letter 2

I wanted to write another short “epistle” as I did last week, to hopefully encourage you, as well as to bring you up to date on what is happening in our church. Yes there is plenty of troubling news and if we spend too much time dwelling on it, we will find ourselves overwhelmed with worry and fear, two of the enemy’s greatest weapons to paralyze us in troubling times. However, praise God, while there may not be a sure antidote for Covid-19, the promises of God provide a powerful vaccine against this one-two punch of our adversary.

Let me confess however that none of us are exempt from worry, not even your Pastor. I can tell you I’ve memorized these words, having read them many times before from Desire of Age page 330, **“Worry is blind, and cannot discern the future...”** I’ve also read, multiple times, the next few words, and taken great comfort in them... **“but Jesus sees the end from the beginning. In every difficulty, He has His way prepared to bring relief.”** But unfortunately, the irrationality of worry causes us to do things that we look back on later and say, “What is wrong with me?” Let me give you an example.

This Thursday, Pam and I decided to take advantage of the senior shopping hours at Market Basket from 5:30 to 7:00 in the morning. I wasn’t worried that the store wouldn’t have what we needed. (Had plenty of toilet paper). I wasn’t worried that it would be too crowded. I wasn’t worried about paying for our purchases. I wasn’t worried about picking up the virus. (Had my protective gloves on) But speaking of how irrational worry can be, let me tell you what I **was** worried about. I was worried that when we got to the store, there would be people waiting at the entrance to determine if you were old enough to be let in the store. I was confident that they would let me in, but I worried they would question Pam and confront her. Then I would say, “Thanks so much for complementing my wife on her youthful appearance, but I can assure you, we’re not the kind of people to sneak into Market Basket at this hour under false pretenses to buy tofu and bananas.” But then he would say, “I need some ID.” Then I would say, “You’ve got to be kidding me right?” And then he would say “No. License please ma’am.” Then my blood pressure would start to go up. (FYI, I’ve never had a high blood pressure reading in my life.) That’s when I came to my senses and said, **“What is wrong with you Mark?”** Worry deals with falsehood and imaginary realities. Jesus deals with truth, because He is the truth. And the truth of the whole matter is that we got to the store at 6:45, there was no 300 pound bouncer at the door checking ID’s. The store wasn’t even crowded. I should have gone at 8:30 A.M....by that time the place was almost empty!

I'm going to take a wild stab in the dark here and guess that I'm not the only one guilty of letting worry take me to a place of insanity. But I am thankful for the opportunities Jesus gives me, and all of us at this challenging time, to wield the promises of His Word against the assaults of worry. You may remember in John Bunyan's classic, *The Pilgrims Progress*, Christian was approaching a place called the Palace Beautiful to seek lodging for the night. Bunyan writes...

“So I saw in my dream that he (Christian) made haste and went forward, that if possible he might get lodging there. Now, before he had gone far, he entered into a very narrow passage, which was about a furlong off the porter's lodge; and looking before him as he went, he espied two lions in the way. (The lions were chained, but he saw not the chains because it was dark.) Then he was afraid, and thought to go back, for he thought nothing but death was before him. But the porter at the lodge, whose name was Watchful, perceiving that Christian made a halt as if he would go back, cried unto him, saying, "Is thy strength so small? Fear not the lions, for they are chained, and are placed there for the trial of your faith, where it is, and for discovery of those that have none. Keep in the midst of the path, no hurt shall come unto thee." Bunyan concludes this scene with these words... “Then I saw that Christian went on, trembling for fear of the lions, but taking good heed to the directions of the porter; ***he heard them roar, but they did him no harm.***”

Friends, it's a dark time in the world right now. But Jesus says today, to you and me, “Fear not the lions. They are chained, they are toothless, they have been defeated and overcome.” Yes, He still permits them to be placed along our way, but it's only to help us, that we might see if we have any faith in the words He has given us, “Do not worry.” (Mat. 6:25)

I will write to you next week as well. When I do, the world may look worse then than it does now. But remember, the same loving Savior who has already told us in Mat. 24:7 “***there will be pestilences,***” is the same faithful Friend who, seeing what we would be going through in this world right now, says, “***Let not your heart be troubled.***” John 14:1

Till next time, fear not, He is with you, He has called you by your name, you are His.

Pastor Mark (and my youthful looking Pam)