

Christ Lutheran Church Pentecost 6 6/30/2024
“I Wish I Knew A Little More About . . . Sickness and Death” Psalm 30

As usual, I really don't know if you wish you knew a little more about the topic for today. I just know that the realities of sickness and death face every single one of us, and that we have little to no control over either of them making their presence known in our lives. There is One who does have all control, however, when it comes to allowing sickness and death to make their appearances. And, for some reason, He doesn't seem to be too interested in our input or our perspectives on the matter.

Kind of going along with our focus from last Sunday, we have a really hard time figuring out how God applies His sovereignty when it comes to sickness and death. He knows how powerfully these affect us, and yet He still allows them to rear their ugly heads to make our lives miserable. But let me just say this about God: it is not His goal to make our lives miserable. As a matter of fact, it is His goal, as the psalmist wrote in Psalm 30, to *“turn our mourning into dancing . . . and to clothe us with gladness.”* The fact that we don't often see it that way doesn't mean He hasn't accomplished His goal; it simply means that we have not yet received it in all of its fullness. And that makes our encounters with sickness and death in this life all the more difficult.

It is important to remember, I believe, that sickness and death were not in God's original plans for us. I share that with you because sometimes we get in the habit of pointing our fingers at God and blaming Him for our circumstances. I know that it wasn't a large part of the Scriptures which He gave us, but when you and I look over the account of the original creation of all things in Genesis chapters 1 and 2, we come away with the understanding that God created all things in perfect harmony, without sin, without sickness, without death. His plan for us was to exist with Him in a perfect, eternal relationship. That plan, that goal, has never changed.

What changed was us. From Genesis chapter 3 onward we are given the account of humanity's rebellion against God's plan - against God, really. And when our first parents decided to go against God's created order and brought the relational divider we call “sin” into the sinless world, it is no wonder that God became quite perturbed, even angry. Sin was a game-changer for us. What our first parents got by going their own way and satisfying their own desires turned out to be exactly what God was trying to keep away from them! God wanted harmony, perfection, togetherness, forever; they chose self-service, separation, condemnation, sickness, death. And we have inherited all of that.

In case I have not been clear, God hates sin, by the way. It is the one thing that has caused us to experience the ravages of life apart from Him. It is the answer to the “why” question in every instance of sickness and death we experience. And in His anger over that which separates us from Him, He put in place a plan to eradicate its influence in our lives - a plan to restore His relationship with us which we severed, so that His original design for us and Him could still come to pass . . . no, not come to pass, but come to stay . . . forever.

What God decided to do was to go after the root of sickness and death through the giving of the life of His Son. His anger and wrath at sin was fully communicated and delivered to His perfect

Son, and when He died under all of that judgment, God took care of sin at its root. Instead of condemnation for us, there is forgiveness. Instead of sickness and death, there is ultimate healing and life. We know this because Jesus didn't remain dead, but conquered the curse of death by rising to new life Himself. God's promise is that those who believe in and follow His Son receive all of the benefits of His life, death and resurrection; and, in doing so, are given a new perspective on sickness and death in this life, which is delivered to us by the psalmist today when he wrote: *"For God's anger is but for a moment, and His favor is for a lifetime."* What we experience in our bodies and observe in the bodies of those we love due to sickness, is a momentary experience of the effects of sin. What we experience when we watch our loved ones breathe their last, or when we do so ourselves, is also a momentary experience of the effects of sin. God has taken care of that at its root through Jesus so that we can know and believe and trust and hope in the reality that His favor is for a lifetime - a lifetime that will never end.

As we continue to experience sickness and death in our lives, they cause us to yearn for God's ultimate promise of eternal restoration; so much so that we even attempt to demand that restoration right now, in the present. I like to say it this way: We know that we will receive heaven in heaven, but it would sure be nice if we could receive heaven on earth! And that's where we get tripped up sometimes. We know God is all-powerful and all-loving. If He is so, wouldn't He want to relieve me of my present suffering? Wouldn't He want to heal my body? Wouldn't He want to do whatever it takes to keep my spouse with me? Wouldn't He want to take my Mom to be with Him now rather than allow her to suffer for years? He can do all of those things, so why not?

I totally get questions like this, because really, we were not originally made to go through these things. These are foreign to God's design for the human experience. His answer to all of them . . . is Jesus. I'm sorry it is so simple, but it is, even though sometimes we attempt to twist that simplicity to serve our own needs. For example, in the apostle first Paul's letter to the Corinthian Christians, he points out something we are tempted to do in the here and now with our faith which completely ignores God's ultimate fulfillment for us. In chapter 15:19 he writes, *"If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."* In other words, if we are so focused on finding our fulfillment in the here and now according to our own definitions, we are missing out on God's Big Deal for us! Instead of only hoping that Christ can make a difference right now by bringing immediate healing or postponement of death, we can rejoice in His resurrection as God's victory over all of it. Even in the midst of our grieving and mourning, we can join the psalmist who wrote, *"You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, that my glory may sing Your praise and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to You forever!"*

Our desires that sickness be minimized and go away, and that death be gone, are the same desires God has. And He has killed off the root of both of them through His Son. We will still cry and grieve and mourn as we suffer loss - this is what it means to love. Even Jesus did so when He cried at the death of those He loved. As the psalmist reminds us though, there is a bigger picture which can inform every moment: *"Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning."* Amen.