

*From the Pastor...*

**“Why Would God Allow this Pandemic?”**

If you are like me, you are sick and tired of hearing people talk about the pandemic. Believe me, I get it. And I was tempted to write an article about something completely unrelated. But I’ve heard this question a few times over the past two months from various sources. And for every person who voiced their concern, I am sure there are several others who have been wondering the same in silence. “Why would God allow this pandemic?” It isn’t a new question. Formally it is framed as, “why does a good, all-powerful, all-knowing God allow bad things to happen to good people?” It has been a classic problem for thousands of years.

The rote answers tend to come in a couple of knee jerk formulas like:

“God works in mysterious ways.”

“When life gives you lemons, God will make lemonade.”

“When God shuts a door, He opens a window”

Most of these common answers to the question of why God allows suffering tend to say about the same thing “God works bad things into good things.” And the funny thing is, while it’s kind of a shallow answer and doesn’t delve into the heart of the problem, it is true. In fact, these are Biblical concepts.

-God DOES work in mysterious ways. “His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts” -Isaiah 55:8.

-God DOES make lemonade out of lemons.... “ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.”- Romans 8:28.

-When God shuts a door He does often open a window... “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not

let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” -1 Corinthians 10:13.

It is true, that in the face of real suffering and trouble, God is still good and when we turn to Him and trust in Him, there is blessing and various forms of deliverance.

And this answer works to a degree. But it does not address an underlying concern. If God does love us and He is Good, and He has the knowledge and power, why would He allow us to suffer in the first place? That good will come of it does not, on it’s own, seem to be the full answer when we are faced with real, specific suffering, or tangible, present evil. It is one thing to say, “God will work things out in the end” when we are talking about injustice, or suffering in general... but when we are talking about specific, present suffering- lost income, or serious illness, or the reality of death for ourselves or a loved one- especially when such suffering comes to someone that seems exceptionally undeserving- the answer “it will all work out in the end” seems anemic at best and at worst, condescending.

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Such answers may be true, but they are true in the context of a different worldview than most people have who ask such questions. For example, all of the Apostles of Jesus except for John died a horrible, grisly death at the hand of persecution. Peter was crucified upside down, Paul was beheaded, James (the half-brother of Jesus) was thrown from the temple and beaten to death with clubs, Andrew was crucified in Greece, Thomas was stabbed to death with spears, we don't know the details of Philip's death but it is rumored that he was crucified upside down while he preached to those gathered, Matthew was burned, stabbed, beheaded and crucified (depending on which report you believe), Bartholomew was flayed and beheaded, James (the brother of John) was killed with the sword by Herod, Simon and Jude were chopped to pieces by angry pagans, Matthias (the elected replacement of Judas Iscariot) was stoned to death, and while John died of old age, he suffered much in exile. In addition to the nature of their demise, the Apostles all suffered greatly in life as well, being the target of mocking, beating, torture, imprisonment, they suffered humiliation, starvation, exposure, physical and emotional pain, depression, they were separated from their loved ones and sent to preach the gospel of salvation to those who hated them.

I share this in partial response to our question of God "how could You allow people to suffer in a pandemic like this?" as a check to our assumptions. We assume that because God is loving, good, all-powerful and all-knowing, that we deserve His unconditional protection from suffering.

### **We assume wrong.**

Let me rephrase the false assumption. We assume that a people who were created by God for the purpose of loving Him and glorifying His name, who have turned away from Him and reject Him by degrees deserve to be protected from all evil and to have God pour only blessings and delights upon them. We assume that God should protect those who hate Him from suffering and death.

And let me add a word of clarification here. For most people would probably not admit to hating God. But I am not talk about passions. I'm talking about discountenance. Hatred of God is to turn away from Him. And we have all done that. In fact, the Scriptures reveal (and life proves the truth of this) that all people are born into a state of hating God- of BEING turned away from Him. We call this original sin- that state of being separated from God and at enmity with Him by nature. We then all live out that enmity by disregarding God's instruction, ignoring His mercies, even rejecting His Word and Son Jesus Christ. And yet we assume we deserve God's unyielding protection and blessing and demand an explanation from God as to why He could be loving and good, and NOT give us what we assume we deserve. We assume wrong.

The truth is, a Good, Just God, must turn such a people over to suffering and death. The right, good and lawful state of sinful people is suffering and ultimately the grave. For God to treat such a people any other way would mean God is not good or just or righteous. We assume God owes us an explanation for suffering because we vastly misunderstand our standing. Far from being the good little children who deserve their Father's love and protection we are in truth, the rebellious criminals who have treated with contempt the one who gave us life, and deserve condemnation and the wages of sin which is death. Our wrong assumption largely stems from our ignorance of the depth of our depravity. As the ascended Jesus said, "You say, 'I am rich; I have grown wealthy and need nothing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked." – Rev. 3:17. We assume we are basically good yet we are filled with murder, envy, lust, gluttony, selfishness, deception, faithlessness, and cruelty. We assume wrong.

The Good news is that while God is good and just, He is also merciful in His loving-kindness. God would be perfectly righteous in turning us over to the full wages of sin- suffering and death. In fact, God's nature demands that to be the case, or God compromises His goodness and righteousness. And God cannot compromise His nature. To offer forgiveness for our wickedness would compromise His righteous nature. Fortunately, God so loves us, even in our wickedness, that He sent Himself (God the Father, sent God the Son) to bear the penalty of our wickedness in Himself so that the wickedness of mankind could receive its just condemnation AND we could benefit from His loving-kindness. So God Himself, in Jesus Christ, paid the penalty for our sin so that we could live in the paradise of fellowship with Him forever and ultimately be delivered from our broken nature and this broken world of suffering.

That is the worldview shift. This world is sinful. As such, suffering, injustice and death reign. BUT God's mercy holds back the full brunt of the suffering that could and even should be experienced in this world. In God's goodness, He is active in withholding the extent of suffering that the world could and even should experience given its broken nature.

And times like these- when we see the active hand of God's mercy withdraw for a season and something like a coronavirus causes a pandemic- when suffering does come- we are faced with a challenge to our assumptions. The opportunity is for us to correct our thinking. Will we stand defiantly in our sinful nature as spoiled children who have demonstrated contempt for the Father and demand an explanation? Or will we recognize that we have been benefitting from God's general grace and taking it for granted while we thumb our noses at God and go about our own business mindless of His calling or His ways?

The truth is, the Apostles all celebrated lives of joy, hope and peace, even while they suffered in this world and died horrible deaths. Because their minds, in Christ, were transferred from this world into the Kingdom of Heaven, they rejoiced even in times of suffering. They both enjoyed fellowship with God now, and looked forward to the redemption of their bodies (and indeed this broken world) at the coming of heaven.

Why would God allow this pandemic to hit us? I hope that you come to the realization of our false assumptions behind the question. The question instead becomes, "God, why have you shown such grace and mercy to a people who have treated You with such contempt? Why is suffering and disaster not the norm every day? Why do we awake each morning with countless blessings and give no thought to the one who has gifted such things to us?"

The answer to these questions is clearly given: "...Beloved, do not let this one thing escape your notice: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some understand slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance." -2 Peter 3:8-9

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life." -John 3:16

*(From the Pastor, Continued... )*

Or do you disregard the riches of His kindness, tolerance, and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you to repentance? But because of your hard and unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed...."-Romans 2:4,5

Really the answer to why God allows bad things to happen to good people has definitive answers: To grasp them we must recognize our sinful nature and repent- turn from our godlessness and toward God's loving mercy in Jesus Christ. For the first answer is, there are no good people. We are all deserving of suffering beyond our imagination, and certainly beyond what we've experienced.

And yet God has not given us what we deserve, but out of His loving-kindness, has taken our sin upon Himself, paying the price for it on the cross so we could be delivered into eternal life.

Then, eternal life is ours. It is the hope, joy and peace that transcends the sufferings of this world because of the fellowship we have with God AND the anticipation of the promise of heaven.

For the Apostles and all of God's children (adopted through faith in Jesus), we now understand the nature of this world- our place in it, and the work that God is doing. There will be a day of reckoning when all wickedness will be judged, all suffering done away with, and a new heaven and earth established without sin or suffering or death. And until then, God holds back the winds of condemnation and the clutches of death, in active grace for the sake of the wicked- that they might turn from their ways and welcome God's embrace. And that means us.

So my friends, I invite you to adjust your assumptions. May this time of trial serve as a wake-up call, that we might recognize the many ways we and our cultures have turned away from God and taken for granted His daily mercies, and seek His grace and healing. For only when we are under the grace of God, can we receive lasting deliverance from suffering and death. For HE IS RISEN!

He is Risen Indeed.

Pastor Aaron



## MAY BIRTHDAYS

2<sup>ND</sup> SUSAN HAUSER

5<sup>TH</sup> NOREEN RHOADES

6<sup>TH</sup> JOCELYN SHELLITO

12<sup>TH</sup> SHERYL KEADY

13<sup>TH</sup> PAT BROWN

15<sup>TH</sup> GERI COKER

19<sup>TH</sup> BEV MOULTON

20<sup>TH</sup> JOSIE SMITH

25<sup>TH</sup> CHUCK COKER

## MAY ANNIVERSARIES

1<sup>ST</sup> RODNEY & KATHY TODD

3<sup>RD</sup> AARON & KRISTA BEATY

8<sup>TH</sup> FRANK & PATTY HARVEY

### DEACONS DOINGS

Please don't forget the Food Barrel stationed in the church lobby. Make a habit of picking up a few items for the barrel each time you go shopping. The donated foods are used by those coming to our door, looking for something because they're hungry, and by the Food Bank (who is contacted periodically to empty our barrel). Though any nonperishable food is appreciated, especially needed are meals-in-a-can (chili, soups, stews), canned meats (Spam, tuna), canned fruits & vegetables, and peanut butter.

And don't forget pets.

Many transients have a "travel companion" and low-income families have a furry family member.

## **Thoughts from an Elder: by Joe Riker**

### **Children of God**

Some of you might think that Easter is over. It's not. We can't just cross off another holiday, celebration, or pageant as if it just ended there. Now is a time to reflect on the true message behind that agonizing period we just celebrated. A time to contemplate the message of Christ's love and His sacrifice for our salvation. For the church, after the observance of Easter, there begins a seven-week period of sustained reflection and celebration. This is the time where the Gospels report on the appearances of Christ to his disciples and others, His Ascension, and culminating at Pentecost with the "power" of the Holy Spirit—breathed to the disciples.

In this post-Easter time we see several prominent themes as we continue to celebrate the mystery of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. Themes leading us to the message of brotherly love just as Jesus gave it to his disciples. In John 13:31-32, 35 "... Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man is seen for who he is, and God has seen for who is in him. The moment God is seen in him, God's glory will be on display. In glorifying him, he himself is glorified—Glory all around' Then Jesus said, 'Let me give you a new command; Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other.'

Did you hear what John said? (1 John 3:1-7)

Just imagine how much love the Father showed us by allowing us to be called "Children of God". And that's exactly who we are! My loved one, at present that's who we are "Children of God", even though our future may not have yet taken shape. And as God's children we become who we are through our relationship with God and God's people.

Biblical Christian conviction holds that the two subjects, love and God, are intricately intertwined. If we want to deal with God in the right way, we have to learn to love the right way. If we want to love the right way, we have to deal with God in the right way. God and love cannot be separated. Remember Christ died for us when we were still sinners. His sacrifice was not dependent on our performance, but on His love. Yet, after Easter, after the death of this man, Jesus, we find ourselves asking, "What now?" How do we continue to live the command to love one another?

Christ's love has no strings, no expectations, no hidden agendas, no secrets. His love is up front and clear. "I love you," he says. "Even if you let me down, I love you in spite of your failures.

### **Thoughts from an Elder: Continued**

Let these words resonate in your heart: the God who created you, loves you. HE made the ultimate sacrifice because of you. No, God doesn't need you. He wants you. So, what are we to do with this gift? What does it have to do with our daily existence? What is our "daily existence?"

I have not heard a better expression of what our daily existence might be than that by Malcolm Muggeridge, British journalist and social critic who said: "When I look back on my life nowadays, which I sometimes do, what strikes me forcibly about it is that what seemed at the time most significant and seductive, seems now most futile and absurd."

The true purpose of our existence in this world is quite simply; to look for God, and, in looking, to find Him, and having found Him, to love Him, thereby establishing a harmonious relationship with His purpose for His creation.

For those in Christ, these promises are not only a source of joy; they are also our foundation of true courage. You are guaranteed that your sins will be filtered through, hidden in, and screened out by the sacrifice of Jesus. When God looks at you, he doesn't just see "you"; He sees the One who surrounds you. This means that failure is not a concern for you. Your victory is secure. How could you not be courageous?

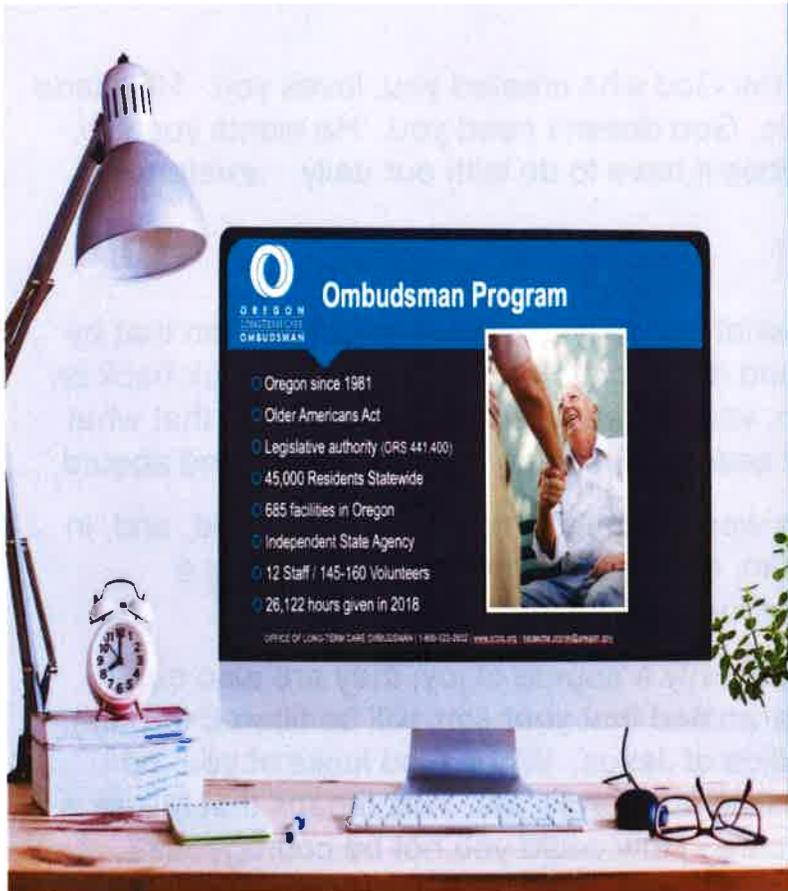
Or as John put it: He who practices justice is just, even as Christ is just...Any person who doesn't practice justice and who doesn't love his brother is not fathered by God. For the word you got from the start is this: Let us love one another.

But also, as John points out, we are not merely CALLED the children of God; we ARE the children of God. Not only is the name ours; the reality is ours.

In God, the sign of the greatness of His love for creation is manifest in calling believers "His children". This greatness of love is reiterated and expanded in the gospels. It is emphasized in the words of John; where Jesus brings to us a new revaluation of love. Love, that is revealed to our minds and lived out before our eyes in Jesus Christ. Jesus' mission was to bring all men to know the divine love that God gives all. So, in his letters we hear John proclaiming that the original and basic unity of God and love comes to focus for us in Jesus Christ.

John offers these words to strengthen the joys of the Christian, to give assurance of our continuing relationship with Jesus Christ as we offer ourselves continuously to God who confirms it with the promise of eternal life. John tells us to probe deep within Jesus. Explore every corner. Search every angle. Love is all you find. Go to the beginning of every decision he made and you find it. Go to the end of every story he told and you'll see it. Love... The salvation of man is through love and in love.

Or as Max Lucado puts it: "The best is yet to be. And so I plead, finish the journey. And so I exhort, be there. Be there when God whispers your name—in Love."



# Stuck at home?

*Why not use this time to learn about the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program!*

Certified Ombudsman Volunteers are independent advocates who listen to, and address the concerns of residents living in long-term care facilities. They investigate concerns and complaints, work with those involved to resolve problems and help to ensure resident rights and dignity.

## FREE WEBINAR!

Every Thursday at 1:30PM

Register for the webinar at:  
[www.oltco.org/ltco/volunteer](http://www.oltco.org/ltco/volunteer)

Questions? Would you like to know more? Contact Natascha Cronin at [natascha.cronin@oregon.gov](mailto:natascha.cronin@oregon.gov) or call 971.600.6149



## Stewardship & Finance Committee

### Financial Report

### February 2020

At a glance

Operating Inc.:	\$10,310.50
Operating Exp.:	\$9,630.65
Monthly Net:	\$679.85
<b>Ckg Acct Bal 3/31</b>	<b>\$30,767.49</b>

March, 2020

Here is our monthly update on finance:

March Operating Income: \$10,310.50

Expenses: \$9,630.65 Net: \$679.85

Year-to-Date Net: (\$274.87)

Greetings All!

Hoping you are all safe and well during this unprecedented time and that we will see you all in the near future. Many Blessings, Thank

you everyone for your continued support of our Church home! Peace and good health to all!

Kathy Todd



Give



Serve



Attend



Grow

*Stewardship*  
a way of life



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We're on the web!

[www.peaceEPC.com](http://www.peaceEPC.com)

"like" us on Facebook

*"In all your ways acknowledge  
Him, and He will make your  
paths straight"  
-Prov. 3:6*



5/3 - 1 Peter Part III  
"The Spiritual House"  
1 Peter 2:1-12

5/10 - 1 Peter Part IV  
"Submit to Authority"  
1 Peter 2:13-25

5/17 - 1 Peter Part V  
"Respect and Submission"  
1 Peter 3:1-7

5/24 -  
1 Peter Part VI: "Be the Blessing"  
1 Peter 3:8-12

5/31 - (Pentecost)  
1 Peter Part VII:  
"Zeal for what is Good"  
1 Peter 3:13-22

## Your SESSION

### Elders

- Pastor Aaron Beaty- Session Moderator
- Noreen Rhoades- Clerk of Session
- Kathy Todd- Finance & Stewardship
- Don Perryman- Christian Education
- Linda Dart- Mission and Outreach
- Jim Zeller- Building and Grounds
- Sally Heaton- Worship

## Your DEACONS

### Geri Coker- Chair

- Bev Moulton
- Susan Orton
- Jocelyn Shellito
- Vicki Zeller

*The Deacons meet the third Sunday of each month following worship.*

## Your

## TRUSTEES

- Harold Heaton
- Sheryl Keady
- Stephen Goode

*Session meets the 2nd Wednesday of each month  
from 6-8PM.*

