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A PASTORAL LETTER TO THE CONGREGATION

January 22, 2021

When Aaron e-mailed and asked if I would write the Pastoral Letter for this week the first thing that came to mind was an excerpt from a child's book entitled, Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day. Alexander, in the story, is approximately 07 or 08 years of age. Alexander has had one of those days! You know what I mean! One of those days when it seems that absolutely nothing was going right. He wakes up in the morning and we read these words; *"I went to sleep with gum in my mouth and now there is gum in my hair and when I got out of bed this morning I tripped on the skateboard and by mistake I dropped my sweater in the sink while the water was running and I could tell it was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day."*

What a terrible day it was! A horrible visit with the dentist and a terrible experience at the shoe store. At the end of the day we see him slumped in his chair at the supper table. His troubles continue: *"there were lima beans for dinner, and I hate limas. There was kissing on TV, and I hate kissing. My bath was too hot, I got soap in my eyes, my marble went down the drain, and I had to wear my railroad train pajamas. When I went to bed Nick took the pillow he said I could keep and the Mickey Mouse night-light burned out and I bit my tongue. The cat wants to sleep with Anthony, not with me. It has been a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day."*

As I read I thought, have you ever felt like that? Do you ever feel so discouraged that you sometimes wonder whether or not life is worth living? Have you ever felt so down you wondered as to whether or not you could face another day? All of these questions come to mind as I reflect on what it has been like since the beginning of COVID-19 reaching back to March of 2020.

As I read of Alexander's experiences, I could not help but think of the Apostle Paul. If any person ever had occasion to be overcome by life's experiences it must have been Paul.

You know the story! Whipped five times by the Jews; three times by the Romans; once stoned; shipwrecked on three occasions, and on one such occasion, Paul spent 24 hours in the water; imprisoned; danger from floods and robbers, from fellow Jews and from Gentiles; turned upon not just by his enemies, but by friends as well; often times hungry and thirsty; pressure from the churches. The list is endless! His much discussed "thorn in the flesh"—a painful physical ailment, what exactly it was we know not? Some scholars suggest the thorn in the flesh was recurring attacks of malaria, others a recurring depression brought about as a result of the daily care for the many churches he helped bring into being along the Mediterranean coast line. Three times he prayed for delivery from the affliction. The answer was never "yes", rather the answer came in these words *"My grace is all you need..."* and so he writes: *"I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."* (2 Cors. 12:9 -10) Grace ---God's gift of unconditional love!

Pandemic days...now months leading many to what mental health...people are beginning to call "pandemic fatigue". *"Terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days"* come to each one of us! How often are we reminded within the compass of our faith that God promises us no "bubble" of protection, no guaranteed release from calamity, individually or collectively—indeed, we will have, as Alexander had, days, sometimes weeks, or as in the present, months which seem never to end as we move from red

to orange to yellow and then, repeat from yellow to orange ever being threatened by red. Months it would seem that appear horrible, terrible, no good.

What then are our resources of faith? What do we do? I believe we are called upon to cultivate the art of being quiet. In other words don't permit yourself to get in a dither. Robert Louis Stevenson once wrote: "Quiet minds cannot be perplexed or frightened but go on in fortune or misfortune at their private pace like the ticking of a clock during a thunderstorm."

The late Dr. Norman Vincent Peale writes of an occasion when he and Mrs. Peale were vacationing in their farmhouse along the rolling hills of Dutchess County, New York. The farmhouse is situated on a hilltop, and from the hill it is possible to see for miles around. Sometimes, he writes, the wind forces are so great that large trees are uprooted in an instant and great branches break off and crash to the earth. The people in the area respect the destructive capacity of such storms.

In the farm place, an old grandfather clock sits on the mantelpiece. The clock dates back more than 150 years. One night, out of nowhere, one of those destructive storms came up. The wind was so ferocious that it shook the house and as Dr. Peale expresses it: *"it sounded like the roar of a thousand locomotives or 500 jet airplanes."* With a flashlight he went outside and everywhere he shone the light he could see nothing but the leaves of the trees boiling in fury. To Dr. Peale it was a fascinating experience.

He returned to the farmhouse! The lights went out! He and Mrs. Peale lit a kerosene lamp and sat in front of the fireplace listening to the wind roaring and the rains beating, to the crash of the thunder and the awesome beauty of the lightning. As they sat in the quietness, in one of those little islands of peace that often times come in the course of a storm, they could hear the clock going, *"tick, tock, tick, tock"*. *"It didn't"* as Dr. Peale expresses it didn't say *"My, oh my, aren't we in a terrible situation? What is ever going to happen to us?"* Rather the clock went on. *"Tick, tock, tick, tock."* How many times the clock had been ticking like that through other storms. It seemed to Dr. Peale to be saying *"There is no storm that ever blows up that will not ultimately blow itself out."*

Isn't that one of the great truths of the Christian faith? Storms do come, storms do pass and this Pandemic is undoubtedly the worse storm the world has experienced since the "great flu" of 1918. No matter how horrible Alexander's day was, no matter how terrible or horrible our days, weeks, months that come into life, if we will, will pass.

May God grant in these days, and in weeks when you and I feel very much like Alexander, the grace to cultivate the quiet mind, *"to be still and know that I am God."* May we be given grace to know that we have a God who goes with us every step of the way. May we be given grace to realize that more important than the COVIDS, which come to us in life, are the attitude we take toward such events. May we, with Paul, through every experience of our living and dying hear the voice which says: *"My grace is all you need..."* God bless!

Sincerely,

The Rev. Dr. Douglas MacEachern, Minister Emeritus



No in-person Worship during Zone 1 Red Phase

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