

5/20/20

Facebook Article #17



*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.*

Greetings Brothers and Sisters,

Welcome once again to a fireside chat at the Hyests. Over two months of partial quarantine. It seems like two years, does it not? Even for people who are used to living out, this is becoming a bit much. Everything is at best inconvenient and awkward.

There are a lot of emotions accompanying this epidemic. For those who are working, perhaps some legitimate anxiety as you are exposed daily to the virus and risk of bringing it home to your family.

For those who are not working and following the isolation regimen, life seems muddled, like peering through a very dirty window. Now retired and no Sunday or Wednesday assemblies I have to calculate what day of the week it is. We have virtual assemblies, but somehow that's not quite the same. With unseasonal weather it's even hard to remember what month we are in. Time is in a warp without a direction. I sometimes wake up in the morning with a strange

sensation that this is all a dream. After a few brief moments of reflection, I realize it is not. Perhaps it is a dream of a sort; something like a living nightmare.

Sometimes I have a sense of sadness. Sadness over all the deaths on top of all we would have had without the disease. Sadness over all the people working tirelessly on the frontline or behind it instead of being safe at home. Sadness because I cannot do much except stay out of the way.

Sometimes I feel aggravation. I am irritated daily over the breadth of bad attitudes manifested throughout the present distress. Many demonstrate self-sacrifice and compassion as they rise to the occasion to fight the disease, treat the suffering, and provide necessary services to those in need, but others demonstrate the worst of human life as they intensify the distress with their rhetoric, try to capitalize on the chaos, and relentlessly pursue self-interest.

Sometimes I feel fatigue too. I don't know if I can distinguish between age and stress as the fatigue-causing agent, but I suspect some of it is from the present distress. Maybe not. Maybe it is just age.

Sometimes I feel anger, but it is anger without a target. I want to vent my anger, but at best it is shadow boxing at an invisible target. Other times I want to feel sorry for myself. Sometimes I feel angry with my sense of feeling sorry for myself. Other times I feel sorry about my anger. Whenever the sorrow or anger begins to build, I always manage to see my blessings. I am not sure how I do that (maybe it's all those years of spiritual training) and I find it a little annoying. I want to complain, but I remember the throngs of people who have suffered throughout history so much more than I even in the midst of this epidemic. This thought takes away my justification for complaint and I sort of feel wronged because of it. Now if that isn't strange! I want my situation to appear bad enough to justify complaining, but not really be bad enough to truly justify it. If it should get so bad that I can no longer see others that are worse off, then that is going to be really bad. I don't want that; I don't want that for you. Maybe I should give up on history. Henry Ford thought it was bunk. But he was terribly wrong. History gives us perspective; points of comparison that help us to see the reality of our situation. So I have to deal with my unjustified tendency to be angry with that which I do not like and my natural human inclination to feel sorry for myself. This is the time to look once again at Psalm 23.

David marveled how he could be beset by foes all around; how he could be literally walking through the valley of the shadow of death and still have a meal (a table) set before him. By trusting in the Shepherd; by following Him, not only was he provided with his needs, he could pause to enjoy that which was provided, and appreciate it. I have marveled many times over the last couple of months when Sharon and I sit down to eat how bountifully we have been provided for; how enjoyable our repasts are in the midst of an epidemic. I think, "How can this be?" It seems we should be suffering; instead we are enjoying. We should be deprived, instead we are receiving abundance. Yes, it could all end tomorrow if we contract the virus, but for today, and for many today's, we have had a table prepared before us in the midst of our enemies. I suspect that many of you have had the same experience. I hope the blessing has not been missed. Yes, we do work hard to raise much of our food, Sharon is quite skilled in preparing it, I am quite

adept at consuming it, and we are able to enjoy it in the middle of a crisis. But it all comes from the hand of God. It's hard to reconcile the two competing emotions which are both present even as we pray before the meal: distress and joy. Thankfully the joy seems to be consistently winning out over the lament. I think that's a good thing.

The Lord is a bountiful provider, even for the unbeliever. At the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught God, "makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust (Mt. 5:45)." Blessings abound even to those who do not deserve or appreciate them. I might wish the Lord distinguish between the two and bless only the deserving, but perhaps there aren't any. At least I would first want to be sure I was in the right category; that I was following the Shepherd before the flock got culled.

When Elijah declared a drought during the reign of Ahab, the Lord told him to flee to a widow in Zarephath (1Kgs. 17:8-16). This widow was down to her last handful of flour and measure of oil when Elijah asked for some water and a piece of bread. Elijah prevailed upon her to make the bread, promising the Lord would not let her run out. The Lord provided flour and oil until the drought ended. This may not seem like a bountiful table, but when there is nothing, little will suffice. If you have ever packed simple food for a long trail hike, it is nothing fancy. It is not what we would consider a bountiful spread for an evening meal, but when it is all you have and you are hungry, it is a king's repast. The Lord provides even in the times of great distress. He sets before us a table in the presence of our enemies whether they be human, Covid 19, or something else... if we follow the Shepherd.

Lord, thank you for the abundance which you have showered upon us in this present distress and forever.

For now Sharon and I love you and miss you. May the Lord bless you and keep you, may His light shine upon you and grant you peace.

Jim and Sharon