

God Moves in a Mysterious Way (LSB #765)

- 1 God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea And rides upon the storm.
- 2 Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, But trust Him for His grace; Behind a frowning providence Faith sees a smiling face.
- 3 His purposes will ripen fast, Unfolding ev'ry hour; The bud may have a bitter taste, But sweet will be the flow'r.
- 4 Blind unbelief is sure to err And scan His work in vain; God is His own interpreter, And He will make it plain
- 5 You fearful saints, fresh courage take; The clouds you so much dread Are big with mercy and will break In blessings on your head.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Yesterday, Riverstone Health, through the Health Officer of Yellowstone County, closed all bars, casinos, roller rinks, massage parlors, dine-in restaurants, and churches, as well as all funeral establishments and activities in Yellowstone County effective until April 10th. It is my belief that the Governor of Montana will issue a similar closure for the entire State soon as many other States have also taken this step. This means that we can no longer gather in worship or for a funeral, not even in groups of ten or less. I believe that this is a step too far. Our District President has registered our objection to the Governor and asked for clarification. It is exactly in times like these that people need the true comfort and peace that Christ provides through His Church.

We are called to obey God and serve Him only, and also to honor and obey other authorities such as our parents and the governing authorities. We are to remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy each week, and we are not to do any harm to our neighbor's body but help and support him in every physical need. The 1st, 3rd, 4th, and 5th commandments all have something to say and to teach us in this crisis but there is no easy answer as we try to be blameless before God and man.

I do not desire to antagonize those that God has placed in authority over us in this earthly kingdom and I cannot urge you to civil disobedience, but neither can I remain silent and not carry out the duties of the vocation that God has given me to serve you. Preaching God's Word, pointing you to your Baptism, absolving your sins, and administering the Lord's Supper to you not only prepares and strengthens you for this life, but these Holy Things of God also prepare you for death and they alone give the Peace that only Christ can give.

After much prayer and discussion with our District President and numerous pastors in the Southern Circuit, here are my thoughts for how we must proceed for the time being.

1. PRAY. Set aside the time and space to pray for those suffering. For all doctors and nurses who care for the body, for truck drivers delivering our daily bread, for those who have suddenly become unemployed, those who are high risk and shut-in who may not have all that they need or anyone to help them get it. Pray for our District President, for you pastor, and all pastors in Christ, our Government and the President, and finally for deliverance and for peace.

2. REPENT. We are to blame for being lumped in with such frivolous things as bars, casinos, roller rinks, massage parlors and dine in restaurants. By our actions we have conveyed to the world that the Church is less important than sports, drinking with friends, being entertained, yard work, sleeping in, vacation plans, etc. The government is only treating Christ's Church as we ourselves have treated His Church. For this we must repent and cast ourselves upon the mercy of our gracious and forgiving Savior, Jesus Christ. We also have work to do in changing this perception, first by changing our own habits about church – making the holy things of God a priority, and second, by showing the world the love of Christ, especially in times of crisis, why we actually exist.

3. FAMILY DEVOTIONS. Use this time that you are kept away from God's House of prayer to read and study God's Word as a family. Read and study your catechism; many of the questions and answers address the very issues we are facing now. Read the Gospel of Matthew, especially the Passion account as we are in Lent. Read Paul's letter to the Romans. Read the Proverbs each day, pray the Psalms as Jesus Himself did, and sing our wonderful Lutheran hymns. If you do not have your own hymnal, please come by the church and check one out to use at home.

4. CORPORATE WORSHIP. While we cannot gather publicly and I cannot encourage you at this time to be disobedient to the civil authorities, we can and will make use of technology in order to worship. At 10AM every Sunday I will lead a Matins service from the sanctuary of CTK and it will be live-streamed on Facebook. (www.facebook.com/pastorwendt) *(It appears that you will need to open a Facebook account (it is free) in order to view the live-stream.)* I am looking for other options that are affordable to make this easier for our members. At the very least, the sermon will be posted on our website by noon on Sunday. (www.ctkbillings.org/sermons) I also plan to live-stream the Wednesday evening services as well as the services of Holy Week. If I have your email address, you will receive an emailed bulletin for each of these services. If I do not have your email address, please share it with me and I will add you to the private list. (Email me at pastorwendt@gmail.com)

5. CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION and THE LORD'S SUPPER. Jesus offers a medicine for our bodies and souls that you cannot receive anywhere else – His very own holy body and blood for forgiveness, life, and salvation. So that you can continue to receive the sacrament at least every other week, I will be available by appointment Monday – Thursday at the church. Please call (860.9540) and schedule a time to come to CTK (by yourself or with your family). You should plan for about 20 minutes and you can expect that the space in which we meet and the vessels used to distribute the Lord's Supper will be cleaned in-between each use. For those who are high-risk and not able to leave their homes I will talk with you about a time and a safe manner in which to come to you.

6. OFFERING. Please consider that the church still has financial obligations and that CTK often assists those who need food who come to our doors. The Montana District and our District president

are funded almost entirely by gifts that the congregations give for their support. We had also recently decided to use the Midweek offerings that we receive to purchase new communion vessels (\$3000). Though we are not gathering face to face, these needs go on. Please consider setting aside your gift and mailing it to the church each week or month. If you are interested in signing up for a direct withdrawal from your account, we can also assist with that at no charge to you or the congregation.

7. HEALTH. Please do what you can to take care of your body, which is the Holy Spirit's temple. If you are in one of the high-risk categories or if you are already sick, use good judgment about going out at all and consider how your actions may affect (or infect) your neighbors. If you do become sick please contact me directly (860.9540) and I will do what I can to come and visit you. Please realize that I might be restricted from visiting you in the hospital or care facilities that are on lock-down – also know that this grieves me greatly.

Please pass this along to any of our members who may not have email. I will be making calls but it might be difficult to get this information out to everyone before tomorrow morning.

Finally, consider again Jesus' words from His High Priestly Prayer in John 16-17 (listed below). Take comfort in them, especially verses 16:33 and 17:20. Jesus has overcome the world and He prays for you. Know that I am also in constant prayer for you and for our congregation. Jesus loves you and has forgiven your sins and nothing can ever separate you from His love! (Romans 8)

In Christ,

Pastor Wendt

Collects for your use:

Lord God, we humbly confess to You that we deserve Your fatherly chastisement for our sins; yet we earnestly implore You, for Your name's sake, to spare us in this time of disaster. Restrain all harmful powers and help Your suffering people that Your Word may be declared faithfully and without hindrance and that we, amending our sinful lives, may walk in safety and peace according to Your holy commandments; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

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John 16:1—17:26

¹"I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. ²They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. ³And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. ⁴But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.

"I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. ⁵But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' ⁶But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

¹²"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

¹⁶"A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me." ¹⁷So some of his disciples said to one another, "What is this that he says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me'; and, 'because I am going to the Father'?" ¹⁸So they were saying, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We do not know what he is talking about." ¹⁹Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, "Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, 'A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me'?" ²⁰Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. ²¹When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. ²²So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. ²³In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. ²⁴Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

²⁵"I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. ²⁶In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; ²⁷for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. ²⁸I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father."

²⁹His disciples said, "Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech!" ³⁰Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God." ³¹Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe?" ³²Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. ³³I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

¹When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ²since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. ⁵And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

⁶"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything

that you have given me is from you. ⁸For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. ¹²While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

²⁰[Jesus said:] "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,

²¹that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

²⁴Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."