

In the Garden: The Arrest

Dr. Tom Pace

March 22, 2020

Luke 22:49-53

When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, "Lord, should we strike with the sword?" Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!" Luke 22:49-53 (NRSV)

Join with me in prayer. *O God open us up for whatever you have for each one of us today and for us as a community of faith, for us as a city, country, and world. Open our eyes that we might see, our ears that we might hear your word in the midst of these words. Open our hearts God that we might feel your compassion and then O Lord open our hands that we might serve one another. Amen.*

There is a famous first line in one of the Harry Potter novels. I'm not a big Harry Potter fanatic, but this one has always caught my eye. It says, "These are dark times, there can be no denying." That's true.

I kept thinking about that when I read this verse, the very last verse we read today where Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane and they've come to arrest him. He says, "But this is your hour and the power of darkness." These are dark times.

What do dark times look like for you and for us? Well, it might be someone you love is gravely ill. Maybe you're worried about them passing away. I have a colleague whose parents are feeling that. It may be that you live on the edge of economic devastation and at any time you don't know how you're going to make it to the next paycheck. Then this comes along and how in the world are you going to get through? You've always wondered how you were going to make it through but now how are you going to make it through?

It may be that you're the leader or the owner of a business and you look around at your employees and you think that you have responsibilities. What are you going to do? How are you going to deal with this challenge that's in front of you? I must confess that's in my heart these days.

It may be that you're a parent and at home and they've announced that the schools are going to be closed for the rest of the year. You think to yourself, "What in the world am I going to do with my kids for the rest of this year?"

It may be that you're a retiree or almost-retiree and you think, "What happened to my 401-K?" It may be that you're isolated. That the place you live, or the news has been telling you that you're not to see anybody. You've got to stay by yourself. You can't go out of your house. You are to stay in place and don't run into everyone or connect with anyone. You think, "How am I going to get by without any social connection?" These are dark times.

I've been talking to some folks about how this feels something like 9/11 and how we dealt with all of that. It does feel similar but there are some differences. On the one hand this one sort of came slowly and kind of crept up on us. It's kind of funny to think about what we were thinking a week ago, or two weeks ago. We were thinking, "I may still go on vacation." We thought originally, "Let's just be reasonable. We're not going to cancel everything." Then before you know it everything's cancelled, and it just seems logical right now.

The other difference is that on 9/11 we sort of had an enemy to blame. There's somebody we could say, "It's their fault!" And we could sort of rally around our disdain for those folks who came and attacked us.

I couldn't help but think of this passage from Ephesians 6:12 where Paul says, "Our struggle is not against enemies of flesh and blood but against cosmic powers of this present darkness."

That's what this disease is - it's a power of darkness. A cosmic power. When sin enters the world, along with it comes brokenness and disease and all of the other ills that surround us.

So how does one - I like the phrase - *push back* the darkness? In times like this which we would say make no mistake about it no denying it, these are times of darkness. So how does one push back the darkness?

Well, let's look at this story and see what Jesus did. So, as he's praying with his disciples, he's just finishing that time of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, and the Scripture says that a crowd showed up. It's kind of interesting phrase, it's like they just magically appeared. This

crowd just magically appeared. And we're not exactly sure who they are but there's almost the sense that they're not just the enemy, but what we might call the paparazzi, the people who've gathered around to watch. They've heard about this arrest, how it's getting ready to come down and they want to come see it.

And the Scripture says that the Temple police came to arrest him. The Temple police. These are not Roman soldiers who have come to arrest him, these are the religious authorities who have come to put him in shackles and take him away. What the Scripture says is that one of the disciples... it doesn't really say who it is in the Gospel of Luke, the Gospel of John says it's Simon Peter. But one of the disciples takes out his sword and cuts off the ear of the servant of the High Priest. The Gospel of John says the man's name is Malchus.

There's this interesting phrase and let's look at the Scripture in particular. This is in verses 50 and 51 "And one of them [we assume it's Simon Peter] struck the slave of the High Priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, 'No more of this!' Put away your sword! Stop this fighting!" This battle against the cosmic forces of darkness are not going to be won with swords and clubs and shields and violence. Stop the fighting! No more of this!

I have been preaching over the last years about the growing polarization of our culture and our community. And how we just seem to be on one another all the time and how can that possibly be changed. I've got to confess its sort of a strange feeling to have this refreshing sense of... Our president said this week, "We're all in this together." To feel like this is something we come together to deal with, that we come together to come against. To not feel like this is us against them but this is us together against whatever this cosmic force of darkness is.

I have kind of imagined the powers of darkness sitting in their conference room and Lucifer sitting at the head of the conference table and he's got a white board behind him. He says, "Every time we want to attack these people, these faithful followers of Jesus, we send some calamity on them and it just doesn't work. They all come together. I've got an idea - a brilliant idea! What we'll do is to attack them in a way where they can't come together. Where they have to stay apart. They'll call it 'social distancing' and they'll have to stay apart, and they won't be able to come together. We'll have them right in the palm of our hand!"

Well, not so fast, powers of darkness! Because you can take away our sense of connection of our bodies, but you can't take away our connection of the heart. We will come together. We'll hear the words of Jesus into our ears that say, "No more of this! No more of this fighting!" We can come together.

Let me share some of the ways we can come together. One way is to come together as families or "*framilies*" - friends who function together as a family. We're so busy all the time and so obsessed with all the activities and projects and meetings we have to go to. And to be able to be forced to sit at home with our families, our *framilies*, the people that are so close to us.

Rev. Adam Hamilton at the Church of the Resurrection pointed me recently to a Facebook post that came from a woman who was in Wuhan. She was there and she was sequestered. She was a Christian clearly. Her name is Rebecca Arendell Franks. She posted this on her Facebook page on March 11. She says they're 48 days into their sequester - into their quarantine. She says, "Our family life has never been better. Usually one weekend is long enough before I'm ready to send each of us back to school or work. But for seven weeks we've been home together with very little outside influences or distractions, forced to reconnect with one another, forced to learn how to communicate better, how to give each other space, slow down our pace and be a stronger family than ever before. I've reconnected with lots of old friends. We've talked with our families more than ever before. And more than everything, I am bowled over by God's goodness at every turn. He overwhelms me with his goodness. God is providing so many opportunities for good, while we are here. And he is showing us his goodness every single moment. Oh, the overwhelming, never ending, reckless love of God. Ps. 118:6 says, 'The Lord is with me, I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'"

To realize that the people that God has put closes around you, to invest yourself in them, to come together as a family or a *framily*.

The second thing we can do is come together with words, with expressions of love and encouragement to one another. To pick up the telephone and call someone. To tell people ...that you may not tell as often as you should that "I love you. That I want to be here with you."

I received a very special email from a member of our church just this last week and it was really interesting. She had received a video that I'd sent out. She responded, "You know I live near the church and I can't come over there right now, but I feel closer to you and the church than I have in a long time." I thought that was such an interesting email to receive. It's so uncanny,

that in these times when we're sort of forced to be apart there is a part of us that feels closer to one another than ever before. How does that happen? Because that's what tragedies do to us, what challenges do to us.

I had a meeting this week with a family who'd lost their father and husband - Richard Patterson is his name. He'd passed away not from Covid19 but from a respiratory illness. They were talking about how difficult it was, how they wouldn't be able to have a full funeral with everyone there. But they said something that's really stuck with me. They said, "You know, the good news is that in our family, nothing was left unsaid. That we came together, and we told one another that we loved one another. We let each other about how much we cared about one another."

To be able to say to the people that you love - family, friends, others around you, "Hey, I love you!" To have that in your sort of a quiver of your being able to reach out.

The other thing is to be able to just express that word of encouragement to one another. I was talking to my wife this morning. She had just gotten up and she said, "Tom, I'm over this already. I'm done with this. I'm over it. I'm done talking about it. I don't want to talk about it, I don't want to think about it anymore, or worry about it anymore. I don't want to watch the news about it anymore. I don't want to hear about it anymore. I'm done with it!

And I thought to myself, "Oh, honey, no, you're not. This is going to be a long time. As much as I wish that two weeks from now it's all going to be all past and we're going to be all well and good. We'll go on with our lives. I don't think that's what's happening.

The truth is, that this is going to be like a Marathon. This is going to be perseverance. This is going to be persistence. And what we need is to be able to tell one another, "Hey, you can do this! We can hang in there. We can stay focused. We can stay positive. We can listen to one another with empathy as we struggle through the challenges together. And we can say to one another, 'Hey, we've got this!' We can get through this like we've gotten through so many other things. And God will get us through." To come together with words of love and encouragement.

We also then can come together in prayer. I'll tell you that my prayer life is different than it was two weeks ago. Part of it is that you feel sort of powerless and you don't really know what to do. But you say, "I know what I can do. I can pray. I can pray for our world, and our country, for our leaders, our city leaders and our national leaders, and our state leaders and our world leaders. I can pray for our church. I can pray for our healthcare providers." Thomas had such a great

prayer a few minutes ago praying for those people who put their lives on the line for us who are going to show up. And as the number of patients increases, they're going to keep coming and they're going to put their own selves at risk. To pray for them. The doctors and nurses and all those healthcare providers. To pray for other people by name. Just say their names every day and let them know.

See, what happens when we come together, when we pray and we join together in prayer, it's like we get united in this. We come together in this common purpose, this sense of being - not physically linked arm and arm, but spiritually linked arm in arm. That we want to join together and be agents of God's purposes. And to feel that we're all together in that. Boy, that's what prayer is about. To align us together with God's purposes.

Jesus says, "Put away your swords - no more of this!" Now that's not where he stopped. It goes on in verse 51: "But Jesus said, 'No more of this!' and then he touched his ear and he healed him."

Jesus is a healer. Somebody asked me something this last week in a conversation. He'd been reading about it and he asked, "Why would God send a pandemic?" And I thought, "God doesn't send a pandemic. In the midst of a pandemic God is in the business of healing."

In the midst of this moment of darkness God *pushes back* the darkness - I love that phrase. God pushes back the darkness and is in the healing business. Seventy times in the New Testament Jesus heals.

One of the passages that is so important for us here at St. Luke's, that sort of drives our vision, is from the end of Matthew 9. The Scripture says, "And Jesus traveled about all the villages, preaching the good news..." Then it says, "...healing every disease and sickness." This is what Jesus does. He shares the good news, the gospel of God's love, and he heals every disease and sickness. That's what Jesus does. That's what the Kingdom of God is about. That in the midst of a darkness around, it is this beacon of light, this moment of healing, this moment of the presence of God that shows us God is not in the business of darkness but of light. That God is in the business of healing.

I've told you before that one of the names of God is *Yahweh Jireh* which simply means, "The God who provides." There are many names for God, but one I find most powerful is *Yahweh Rapha* which means "The God who heals." Psalm 103 says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul,

and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul and forget not all his benefits. Who forgives all your iniquities and who heals all your diseases."

We are a people who need God's healing. Healed bodies, healed relationships, a healed economy, healed spirits. A God who heals.

Dee and I were supposed to go to Oberammergau this summer to the Passion Play. I just got word today that that's been postponed until 2022. It's supposed to be held every ten years. The way the Passion Play came to pass was that in 1632 the bubonic plague was moving through Bavaria and the death toll was rising. In March of 1632 it was one thing but by May of that year it had skyrocketed and the people of Oberammergau said, "If you will just save us from the bubonic plague, we will put on a play to demonstrate your love and power every ten years." And by July the plague had passed and in July of 1633 only one person died of bubonic plague. So, they kept their vow, to say, "We believe God is a healing God and we're going to talk about it." And that's what the play is all about.

Our God is a God who heals.

My wife Dee broke her nose two weeks ago. She won't tell us which dog it was but apparently, she was bending over taking off her shoes when one of our tiny little dogs - very tiny - jumped up and hit her in the nose and it broke her nose. She looked like J.J. Watt after it was all over. It wasn't in every way but just with regard to her nose looked like J.J. Watt.

I mean you haven't seen so much blood in all your life. There was blood everywhere and it was just terrifying to me, just seeing it, I was amazed what kind of shock that provides. Just this last Monday she had surgery and they corrected her nose. It was Dr. Eugene Alford, an amazing surgeon who did the surgery. He said, "We were able to just slide her nose right back in place." So, she's walking around with this nose splint on. I really wanted to show you on the television and computer screen a picture of her, especially since she wants to shower but she's not allowed to get her nose cast wet. So, she is using my scuba mask to cover her face so she can take a shower and stay dry.

Here's what I'll tell you. God is in the business of healing her nose. But I will tell you this. God is not doing it alone. Dr. Eugene Alford is in the business of healing. And Gene Alford and God together worked together as partners to bring healing. Healing doesn't happen just accidentally, but we join together with God to bring healing.

I used to just hope and wish I could go back redo my life and be a physician. Because the amazing power of being able to be sort of partner with God to bring healing. How cool would that be! Look, here's what I would tell you. Today we have that opportunity. We can partner with God to bring healing to the world around us. We can do it with something as simple as washing our hands. I've washed my hands more in the last two weeks than I have in I think the three years before that.

You hear it called "social distancing" but I want to share with you a whole new term. I don't like the term "social distancing." I want to call it "distance loving." We're going to do "distance loving." We're going to love other people by keeping our distance, by sharing with them how much we love them from a distance. It's not a long-term thing, but for the short term we're going to do distance loving.

We can join with God by joining in this work together.

I saw a wonderful post from Shane Claiborne, a great prophet and pastor of our time. He said, "I believe in prayer, I also believe in soap." I've been reciting that to myself over and over. "I believe in prayer. I believe God can do this. But I also believe in soap." And we can do this together.

So, friends, these are dark times, there can be no denying that. But we can help to push back the darkness. God is on our side. We can come together, with family, as we express our love and encouragement to one another. We can come together in prayer. And we can join with God in God's healing power. *Yahweh Rapha.*

Let's pray together. *O God of love, in this time we just reach out to you. We see the darkness, but we also look around us and we see the light. We see that you have called us to come together and to put aside our fussing and fighting and to come together side by side. As we face the spiritual forces of darkness, of the disease that wants to come into our lives. God, speak into our hearts, lift us up, encourage us when we get weary. And help us to share with one another your love. And remind us, God, that if you're on our side how can we fail? In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.*