

## An Episcopal Reflection – Covid-19: A Confronting Pestilence

**ESV Psalm 146:5 Blessed is he whose *help* is the God of Jacob, whose *hope* is in the LORD his God...**

We continue to keep our eyes on the Sovereign God, Maker of heaven and earth; He alone is the true source of our help and the unshakeable ground of our hope. In the midst of an age of global danger and seismic turmoil, in which viruses have “weaponized” our technological advances of travel modes of width and speed, we can literally, locally and globally live “*under the shadow of death.*”

The ever increasing “out of control events” globally - colossal bush fires in Australia, flooding in Jakarta and the novel coronavirus [Covid-19]pandemic have proven to us how vulnerable and fragile our world is.

We are also jolted into remembering Matthew chapter 24 in which reference is made by the Lord Jesus about the ever increasing catastrophes that are pre-cursors to His Second Coming.

Under current circumstances at the time of writing, the death toll is 1,491 and 65,247 infected in almost 30 countries and territories, albeit about 7100 have recovered, let us as followers of Christ bear the following in mind and **practice**:

1. **Remain steadfast in our faith** as we trust in the Lord and seek His face and pray for the containment of the situation in the various nations; for protection of those who are at the frontline of the epidemic – patients as well as medical workers, and the researchers who are working over-time to find a vaccine; the availability of necessary resources and supplies for the affected countries and territories; for the children, elderly and sick who are more vulnerable and for the United Nations and the Governments to remain transparent, vigilant and synergistic in dealing with this Novel Coronavirus.
2. **Remain calm** – especially when there is a slew of social media postings sent to you; be discerning – choose to read from those with authority and credibility. Be wise about the “herd stampede mentality” in purchases of certain items, so that those in real need of such items are not deprived.
3. **Take sensible precaution**, but let us also be desirous and practical in fulfilling God’s word in <sup>NLT</sup> **Galatians 6:2** – “Share each other’s burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ.” Fear can indeed do more damage to our witness and behaviour than the virus itself. Let us ask the Lord for the grace of faith to overcome fear. In this way this confronting pestilence can be an opportunity for the people of God to demonstrate a wholesome unity growing from a resoluteness of faith in Christ, our Good Shepherd, bearing good works.
4. **We carry on with our lives** as normally as we can – at home, at work, in church etc.

We have a great saint within our own living memory who have shown us the pathway of God’s sufficiency of grace through the “*valley of the shadow of death*” as she ministered to the countless sick and dying in the streets of Calcutta, Mother Teresa. It is purported that Malcolm Muggeridge fittingly described her as *in dark times, she is a burning and shining light, in cruel times, she is the living embodiment of love, in godless times, she is like the Word becoming flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.*

Confronting this severe pestilence, we are brought into the “presence” of the Sovereign Lord - being reminded of some very key issues in life: that He is the supreme Maker of heaven and earth, and that no creature – no matter how clever, “advanced” and arrogant – can displace Him or throw off dependency on Him. It is a “**reality check moment**” that awakens

each of us to our mortality – that there is death to be faced and that we must be prepared for it, knowing there is no stopping our eventual departure from this earthly life. That in preparing for eternity that has been planted in our hearts [Ecclesiastes 3:11] there is a need for each believer and His Church “to die to self” so as to bear much fruit for Christ [<sup>ESV</sup> **John 12:24**].

Instead of creating greater fear and despair, the followers of Christ are to take it within their stride that the Lord of History is “sitting on the throne, high and lifted up” [Isaiah 6:1]. He is in control, even as we have the Lord Jesus’ own words in the Olivet Discourse [Matthew 24 and 25] concerning times nearing the “the coming of Christ ...and the close of the age” [Matt 24: 3]. This discourse revealed at the Mount of Olives was a prophetic overview of the situations that will take place then in both the near and distant future. The Lord’s emphasis is that His disciples should be concerned with **being prepared** - living God’s way and embracing Kingdom values fully, faithfully and consistently. This is so that His followers will be ever ready – no matter what happens. This includes confronting gigantic pestilences, the unexpected, the uncontrollable and the desperate “birth pangs” –antagonising signs that are increasing in intensity and frequency – until the second coming of Christ.

In being stalked by the Covid-19 virus, a powerful pestilence that makes danger and death most real and near as the face masks present almost everywhere remind us, we are to live by and for the things that are most important – especially right relationships with Almighty God and with people.

As God’s people called Methodists, let us remember the enduring and sound words of the General Rules of the Methodist that had its roots in 1793 [Methodist Book of Discipline p 28-31]. They remain “living”, relevant and efficacious as we face a confronting global pestilence today -

**First: By doing no harm**, by avoiding every evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practised.

**Second: By doing good ...** as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men.

**Third: By attending upon all the ordinances of God** such as the public worship of God [*mandatory spiritual disciplines*].

Let us lift up our eyes and heart unto the Lord, seeking His grace to live by faith, refusing to be stampeded and cowed by fear in a critically challenging season such as this. For in the words of the Apostle Paul –

<sup>ESV</sup> **2 Corinthians 9:8** **And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.**

The peace, protection and grace of the God of Hope – be with us all.

Bishop Ong Hwai Teik  
The Methodist Church in Malaysia

14 February 2020