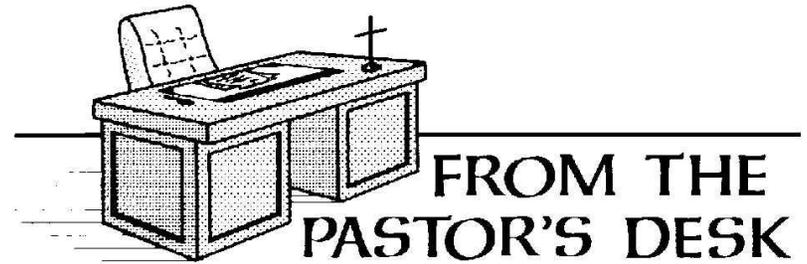


We will stick with the recommendations of our President and Governor, recognizing that the governing authorities are appointed by God.

If you still have questions on this matter, feel free to call and speak with Pastor Schaller.



In 1347-1350, the 'Black Death' or as we know it 'Bubonic Plague' swept out of China (?!) or India and into Europe and as far as Iceland, killing one-fourth of the population of Europe. It was spread by infected rats and other vermin. It was communicated to human beings by fleas, through infection in cuts and abrasions of the skin, even by breathing the air polluted when the sick coughed up germs and by contact with clothing and excrement of the ill.

On August 2, 1527, the black plague came to Germany and struck the city of Wittenberg, where Martin Luther and his family lived. The Elector John (Luther's 'Governor'), fearing for Luther's safety ordered him to leave for the city of Jena. All of the professors of the university fled the city.

Professor Martin Luther, along with Wittenberg Pastor Johannes Bugenhagen ignored the elector and the begging of their friends to stay to minister to the sick and frightened people of Wittenberg. By August 19th there were 18 people dead of the Black Death.

The Plague also appeared in other places that year. When the clergy in Breslau in Silesia heard that the Wittenberg Professors fled the city, they asked whether it was proper for a Christian to flee from such a deadly peril. They wrote to Martin Luther asking his advice. When Luther didn't reply immediately – in part because of his own illness and severe spells of depression – they wrote him a second letter.

Martin Luther did write a letter in reply, entitled: Whether One May Flee From A Deadly Plague. This letter became a 14-page pamphlet later published in 1527. If you wish to read the letter in its entirety, let me know and I'd be glad to print you a copy.

What's the point of this little insert (It will not be 14 pages long)? I am not suggesting that the Coronavirus also called Covid-19 is anything like the Bubonic Plague. When things like this happen there are natural questions.

People don't just have questions; others make assertions and judge the motives and the actions of other people.

When some take the recommendations of the governing authorities seriously and quarantine themselves, others will suggest that they simply don't trust God to protect them.

Let's remember that the LORD does not call upon us to judge the hearts of others. When people's actions are clearly in conflict with God's Word and can be called sin, that's another matter altogether. It's dangerous and foolish business to judge the hearts of others, because we have not been appointed as judges. There is One Judge of hearts, God.

On the other hand, when some mock and poo-poo the recommendations of the governing authorities as an overreaction to nothing – they may put themselves (and others) in danger and tempt God.

If there is a possibility that something that I do could end up ending the life of another, God's will is plain, I should avoid that thing.

It's dangerous and foolish also to take up a 'spiritually fatalistic' attitude and say, 'Well, if I die then it's all good!' or 'I have to die some way!' We let the LORD decide the day of our death and not live in a way that is irresponsible. Remember, when Satan suggested Jesus take up this attitude and leap from the pinnacle of the temple (Luke 4:9-12), the Savior rebuked him. He would rebuke us for taking the same attitude.

Our time of grace is a precious thing and while it will come to a close, we should take care that we do not foolishly speed that day by not using good sense. I guess I'm saying that in times such as these, we need some spiritual balance, to lean neither to the right or to the left.

So, with that in mind, and since you are stuck at home and have time on your hands, please take the time to read these excerpts from Luther's Letter. Perhaps you will agree that He was a man ahead of his time...

"Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Your letter, sent to me at Wittenberg, was received some time ago. You wish to know whether it is proper for a Christian to run away from a deadly plague. I should have answered long ago, but God has for some time disciplined and scourged me so severely that I have been unable to do much reading or writing. Furthermore, it occurred to me that God, the merciful Father, has endowed you so richly with wisdom and truth in Christ that you yourself should be well qualified to decide this matter or

Luther added the following later as a brief summary:

"First, one must admonish the people to attend church and listen to the sermon so that they learn through God's word how to live and how to die."

"Second, everyone should prepare in time and get ready for death by going to confession and taking the sacrament. He should become reconciled with his neighbor and make his will so that if the Lord knocks and he departs before a pastor... can arrive, he has provided for his soul, has let nothing undone, and has committed himself to God."

"Third if someone wants the...pastor to come, let the sick person send word in time to call him and let him do so early enough while he is still in his right mind before the illness overwhelms the patient. The reason I say this is because some are so negligent that they make no request and send no message until the soul is perched for flight on the tip of their tongues...What should a diligent pastor do with such people who neglect both body and soul?"

"In closing, we admonish and plead with you in Christ's name to help us with your prayers to God so that we may do battle with word and precept against the real and spiritual pestilence of Satan in his wickedness with which he now poisons and defiles the world...May Christ our Lord and Savior preserve us all in pure faith and fervent love, unspotted and pure until his day. Amen. Pray for me, a poor sinner."

Good, you made it this far. Permit a little more...not from Martin Luther. Our decision (it wasn't just the Pastor's decision) to suspend our public worship services was done in love and out of concern for our people. It wasn't done in fear, but recognizing that God has established the governing authorities for our good (Romans 13:1-2):

"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. ²Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves."

Let's be clear. The state of Michigan hasn't forbidden public Christian worship, but for the sake of the spread of the virus (along with the President) suggested that gatherings be voluntarily curtailed. If the state were to forbid public worship, we might have a different decision to make. We aren't there yet, and God-willing, we never will get there.

“It is even more shameful for a person to pay no heed to his own body and to fail to protect it against the plague the best he is able, and then to infect and poison others who might have remained alive if he had taken care of his body as he should have. He is thus responsible before God for his neighbor’s death...Indeed, such people behave as though a house were burning in the city and nobody were trying to put the fire out. Instead they give leeway to the flames so that the whole city is consumed, saying that if God so willed, he could save the city without water to quench the fire.”

“No, my dear friends, that is no good. Use medicine; take potions which can help you; fumigate house, yard, and street; shun persons and places wherever your neighbor does not need your presence or has recovered, and act like a man who wants to help put out the burning city.”

“You ought to think this way: ‘Very well, by God’s decree the enemy has sent us poison and deadly offal. Therefore, I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine, and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance infect and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence.’”

“Moreover, he who has contracted the disease and recovered should keep away from others and not admit them into his presence unless it be necessary.”

“Some are even worse than that. They keep it secret that they have the disease and go among others in the belief that by contaminating and poisoning others they can rid themselves of the plague and so recover.”

If in the Old Testament God himself ordered lepers to be banished from the community and compelled to live outside the city to prevent contamination [Leviticus 13-14], we must do the same with this dangerous pestilence so that anyone who becomes infected will stay away from other persons, or allow himself to be taken away and given speedy help with medicine...the poison is stopped in time, which benefits not only the individual but also the whole community, which might be contaminated if one person is permitted to infect others.”

“This is what we think and conclude on this subject of fleeing from death by the plague. If you are of a different opinion, may God enlighten you. Amen.

even weightier problems in his Spirit and grace without our assistance. But now that you keep writing...Therefore we here give you our opinion as far as God grants us to understand and perceive. This we would humbly submit to your judgment and to that of all devout Christians for them, as is proper, to come to their own decision and conclusion.”

“To begin with, some people are of the firm opinion that one need not and should not run away from a deadly plague...They look upon running away as an outright wrong and as lack of belief in God...I cannot censure the former for their excellent decision. They uphold a good cause, a strong faith in God...Since it is generally true of Christians that few are strong and many are weak, one simply cannot place the same burden upon everyone.”

“To put it briefly and concisely, running away from death may happen in one of two ways. First, it may happen in disobedience to God’s word and command...Those who are engaged in a spiritual ministry such as preachers and pastors must likewise remain steadfast before the peril of death...For when people are dying, they most need a spiritual ministry which strengthens and comforts their consciences by word and sacrament and in faith overcomes death. However, where enough preachers are available...and they agree to encourage the other clergy to leave in order not to expose themselves needlessly to danger, I do not consider such conduct sinful.”

“Accordingly, all those in public office such as mayors, judges, and the like are under obligation to remain. This, too, is God’s word, which institutes secular authority and commands that town and country be ruled, protected, and preserved as St. Paul teaches in Romans 13:4, “For he (Governing Authority) is God’s minister to you for good.”

“What applies to these two offices [church and state] should also apply to persons who stand in a relationship of service or duty toward one another...a master should not desert his servant or a lady her maid unless suitable provision or their care has been made somewhere...Likewise, fathers and mothers are bound by God’s law to serve and help their children, and children their fathers and mothers. Where no such emergency exists and where enough people are available for nursing and taking care of the sick...I judge that they have an equal choice either to flee or to remain.”

“If someone is so strong in faith, however, that he can willingly suffer nakedness, hunger, and want without tempting God and not trying to escape, although he could do so, let him continue that way, but let him not condemn those who will not or cannot do the same.”

“Examples in Holy Scripture abundantly prove that to flee from death is not wrong in itself.... Yes, you may reply, but these examples do not refer to dying by pestilence but to death under persecution. Answer: Death is death, no matter how it occurs...Ultimately such talk will lead to the point where we abbreviate the Lord’s Prayer and no longer pray, ‘deliver us from evil’...Where would all this end?”

“We must pray against every form of evil and guard against it to the best of our ability in order not to act contrary to God, as was previously explained. If it be God’s will that evil come upon us and destroy us, none of our precautions will help us. Everybody must take this to heart: first of all, if he feels bound to remain where death rages in order to serve his neighbor, let him commend himself to God and say, ‘Lord, I am in thy hands.’”

“In the same way we must and we owe it to our neighbor to accord him the same treatment in other troubles and perils, also. If his house is on fire, love compels me to run to help him extinguish the flames. If there are enough other people around to put the fire out, I may either go home or remain to help....A man who will not help or support others unless he can do so without affecting his safety or his property will never help his neighbor.”

“It would be well, where there is such an efficient government in cities and states, to maintain municipal homes and hospitals staffed with people to take care of the sick so that patients from private homes can be sent there – as was the intent and purpose of our forefathers with so many pious bequests, hospices, hospitals, and infirmaries so that it should not be necessary for every citizen to maintain a hospital in his own home.”

“Now if a deadly epidemic strikes, we should stay where we are, make our preparations, and take courage in the fact that we are mutually bound together so that we cannot desert one another or flee from one another. First, we can be sure that God’s punishment has come upon us, not only to chastise us for our sins but also to test our faith and love...”

“...we know that it is the devil’s game to induce such fear and dread, we should in turn minimize it, take such courage as to spite and annoy him, and send those terrors right back to him. WE should arm ourselves with this answer to the devil: ‘...Just because you hate it, I’ll spite you by going the more quickly to help my sick neighbor. I’ll pay no attention to you...I know that helping my neighbor is a deed well-pleasing to God... If you can terrorize, Christ can strengthen me. If you can kill, Christ can give life. If you have poison in your fangs, Christ has far greater medicine. Get away, devil. Here is Christ and here am I, his servant in this work. Let Christ prevail! Amen.”

“The second blow against the devil is God’s mighty promise by which he encourages those who minister to the needy. He says in Psalm 41 [1:3],

‘Blessed is he who considers the poor; The LORD will deliver him in time of trouble. ² The LORD will preserve him and keep him alive, And he will be blessed on the earth; You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies. ³ The LORD will strengthen him on his bed of illness; You will sustain him on his sickbed.’

Are not these glorious and mighty promises of God heaped up upon those who minister to the needy? What should terrorize us or frighten us away from such great and divine comfort?”

“Therefore, dear friends, let us not become so desperate as to desert our own whom we are duty-bound to help and flee in such a cowardly way from the terror of the devil, or allow him the joy of mocking us...”

“Others sin on the right hand. They are much too rash and reckless, tempting god and disregarding everything which might counteract death and the plague. They disdain the use of medicines; they do not avoid places and persons infected by the plague, but lightheartedly make sport of it and wish to prove how independent they are. They say that it is God’s punishment; if he wants to protect them, He can do so without medicines or our carefulness. This is not trusting God but tempting him. God has created medicines and provided us with intelligence to guard and take good care of the body so that we can live in good health.”

“If one makes no use of intelligence or medicine when he could do so without detriment to his neighbor, such a person injures his body...By the same reasoning a person might forego eating and drinking, clothing and shelter, and boldly proclaim his faith that if God wanted to preserve him from starvation and cold, he could do so without food and clothing. Actually, that would be suicide.”