

## Quarantine

LaGrave Christian Reformed Church  
Thursday, April 9, 2020- Maundy Thursday Livestream  
Reverend Peter Jonker  
Exodus 34:27-29

Quarantine. That's a word we've heard a few times lately. Shelter in place, self-isolation, quarantine. I recently learned the origin of that word, maybe some of you heard this too. The word was coined in Italy in the 14<sup>th</sup> century during a time of plague. As doctors and scientists began to figure out how disease spread, ships coming in from other countries were forced to isolate for a period of time before they could unload their cargo. Originally that period of time was 30 days, which authorities called a *trentino*. But later the standard was upped to 40 days which was called a *quarantino*. Why was it upped to 40 days? Scholars think it's because of the biblical significance of the number.

In the Bible, 40 is a number tied to a time of testing or trial in which a person is changed, purified, deepened. When you pay attention, the examples are everywhere. In the time of Noah, when God flooded the earth, how long did it rain? 40 days and 40 nights. When Moses went up on Mount Sinai to get the law of God, he was up there for 40 days (and when he came down his face glowed). When Elijah fled from King Ahab, how long did he run before he heard God speak to him in the still small voice? 40 days. And when the prophet Jonah preached to Nineveh telling them to repent or else the Lord would destroy their city, how long did he preach his message? 40 days. And did that message lead to transformation? Yes. The city repented. And finally, the most famous 40 of all-Jesus in the wilderness. When Jesus was tempted by the devil, how long was He in the wilderness? 40 days. Apparently, there were a lot of Biblical quarantines. In every one of these cases, God allowed his servants, people he loved-to be isolated and stressed and deprived and worried for a period of time and He used that time to prepare them for greater things.

That's also why Lent is 40 days right? During Lent, as a way to think of Christ's sacrifice, we deny ourselves for 40 days so that Spirit can make us more attuned to the things of God and so the Spirit can change us and prepare our hearts for new things.

How long has our current quarantine lasted? In Michigan our shelter in place order started on March 24. So today is the 17<sup>th</sup> day of our quarantine. Only 17 days! You thought it was longer than that, didn't you?! If this thing goes 40 days, it will end May 10. Of course, we all know it could go longer than that too.

*But my question is, what will this quarantine do to my soul?* What will it do to our church? What will it do to our society? When this is over, who will I be? Who will we be? Such an important question. Will all this make things worse? Will it unleash a spirit of selfishness and self-preservation? Will it make us all more fearful, more paranoid, more eager to protect myself from the contagion of others? Or will the Holy Spirit transform us? Will the Holy Spirit prepare our hearts for greater things?

I know what I pray for myself. I hope that all this makes me a deeper person. I want to care less about being impressive. I want to be better at loving people. I know what I pray for this church. I pray that we can come out of this even stronger as a church family. I don't want to be a place where we have great music and polished worship-I hope being apart makes us long to be a flesh and blood body of Christ. And I know what I pray for our society. I want us to stop fighting. I want us to care less about winning and having. I want us to love our neighbors in a new and deeper way.

How will it all go? I don't know, but I know where it starts. If I want to be changed and if this church wants to be changed, it starts at the cross. It starts with Jesus. Because on the cross, we see a man who went through temptation, and deprivation, and humiliation, a man who was abandoned, betrayed, and completely socially isolated, a man who was cursed and spit on, a man who endured unspeakable pain *and turned it into everlasting life and a new creation.*

On our own, suffering can make us hard and fearful, but when we are in Christ, God can use these our trials, this suffering to overturn the soil of our life and plant new seed. Good seed. His seed. Standing under the cross we know that God can work these terrible times to His purpose. Standing under the cross we find a love strong enough to get us through this thing, and a love strong enough to save the world. So tonight, in our time of quarantine, Let's stand under the cross, let's fall on our knees and let's give him our heart, our soul, our all.

© Rev. Peter Jonker