

The New Testament Church
The Providence of God in the Coronavirus Pandemic of 2020
March 24, 2020 – - Pastor Paul Jehle

“...in Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things according to the counsel of His will that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.” – Ephesians 1:11-12

Rev. S. W. Foljambe of Malden, Massachusetts, preached an Election Sermon in Boston on January 5, 1876, a hundred years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence. In it he said *“There are no accidents in the lives of men or of nations. We may go back to the underlying cause of every event, and discover in each God’s overruling and intervening wisdom. It has been said that history is the biography of communities; in another, and profounder, sense, it is the autobiography of him ‘who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will’ (Ephesians 1:11), and who is graciously timing all events in the interests of his Christ, and of the kingdom of God on earth.”* In another place he says that *“Human freedom and human responsibility in bringing about either good or evil, are not to be pushed aside; providence is not fatalism; but, on the other hand, man’s free activities do not prove the despotism of a blind chance.”*

If God works all things out for His ultimate purposes in the advance of His Kingdom (Romans 8:28), yet allows the free choices of human beings to be the more immediate secondary cause of both good and evil, how are we to see God’s opportunity in the present Coronavirus pandemic? What is God’s purpose for the Church in such a global, yet local, catastrophe?

Noah Webster accurately defined the doctrine of God’s Providence when he wrote in 1828 that it was *“the care and superintendance which God exercises over his creatures.... By divine providence is often understood God himself.”* God is Sovereign, which means He can do time events in our individual lives and that of nations for the purpose of showing us His redemptive nature in the advance of His Kingdom through love and service. How God cares for His creatures is the way we should care for one another.

The present situation of a general *stay at home quarantine* as well as *the shut down of small and large businesses* cannot continue long without severe consequences. God has designed the principles for a sound economy to combine voluntary self-regulation where needed with the freedom of productivity to deliver goods and services at the local level. *Both must occur at the same time.*

The Providence of God, under His Sovereignty, will use a devastating global pandemic like the Coronavirus to help get our attention. Truly, this is a global situation that is riveting billions of people to their evening news for the statistics and updates that change drastically in 24 hour periods. Though we look for things to change and the emergency orders to be lifted, look at what God is doing in the midst of this! God works all things out for good. Individuals and nations have had to preserve their *homes* as well as ponder how they will be able to *remain employed and productive*. We have seen the following...

- *Individuals and Families return home to navigate the needs of education, family care and neighborly concern – and this has demonstrated our need for stronger homes as well as giving us a time to focus on our primary responsibilities and caring for the most vulnerable that live near us;*
- *With professional and amateur sporting events being canceled, God has removed distractions for the purpose of focusing our attention on that which really matters;*
- *Nations have had to close their borders to curtail the virus, focusing their attention on their first and primary responsibility according to God, to protect their own citizens;*

- *A divisive political landscape of left and right ugliness has been superseded by unity among those at the State and local levels where people are stating “we are Americans” before we are Republicans, Democrats or any other label we are so used to wearing;*
- *Cities, Counties and States (especially Governors) are taking the lead in providing both protection and guidance to truly care for those who are most vulnerable;*
- *The discipline of individual self-regulation, the cornerstone of religious and civil liberty, is being demonstrated as people voluntarily practice social distancing, support their local healthcare workers, and say no to selfish hoarding yet preserve their ability to share with those in need;*
- *Local Businesses, some of whom are threatened with extinction if the “stay at home” orders last too long, are producing new products and sharing their resources in creative ways to supply the needs of local hospitals and those in their communities; putting service above profit;*

We must never forget that it has always been the ingenuity and freedom of individuals, families, local businesses, towns and States, as well as volunteerism, that have been the engine of prosperity throughout history. We have looked to the national government and international alliances to provide what God has designed to be received much more efficiently at the local level. Indeed, God is using this pandemic to shift our focus from the top to the bottom. We can now no longer avoid the discussion that must take place; *socialism or a free market? Centralism or localism? Polarization or unity? Self-government leading to liberty or control from the top?* Please join me as we pray these proclamations together!

- *Lord we come to you today as a unified Church, affirming that you are Sovereign and your Providential care works with and even over-rides many of our choices for our own good;*
- *Lord, as Individuals and Families, we proclaim that we will seize the opportunity while at home to seek You, read your Word, and accept our responsibility to govern at the most basic level;*
- *We ask you to help us look out for those in our neighborhoods and close to us that are the most vulnerable, and see what resources you have given us to meet the need;*
- *We affirm, Lord, and agree with your design to bring forth a righteous remedy for the Coronavirus, both medically and socially, so that we would maintain the self-discipline required to protect our health as well as the freedom necessary to work and be productive;*
- *We see that you, Lord, in spite of the pandemic we are in, have given us an opportunity to let our light shine through works of service in cooperation with local and state government;*
- *We recognize the desire for evil men and women to use a crisis to increase governmental control, reducing the liberties and choices of people, disregarding the care of those most vulnerable such as our unborn babies, the elderly, disadvantaged and marginalized; but*
- *We declare that You, Lord, have taken our focus from ourselves and the fear that evil might win to see the Body of Christ unified and exalting Your Name, that we might work together to see a measure of your Kingdom come, your Will to be done, in our communities as it is in Heaven.*

In Jesus mighty Name, Amen!