

Gracious God, in times of trial, we become afraid and worry about the truth of your promises. Help us in these time to remember that you have claimed and called us: claimed us as your beloved and called us to love one another. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

In this lesson, we examine how people of faith should behave in times of plague – appropriate given that we just went through COVID-19.

Part 1 Christians and the Plague

Read Matthew 22:34-40

1. How does Jesus respond about which commandment is the most important?

2a. What do you think loving God looks like?

b. What does loving your neighbor look like?

c. Jesus says in these verses, “The second commandment is like the first.” What do you think that means? Asked another way . . . can you love God, but not also love your neighbor? (1 John 4:7-21 might help answer this question).

3. So, then, given this scripture, when thinking about how we behave in the context of something life threatening, like a plague, what should we consider?

Read Matthew 25:31-46

4a. Matthew helps us understand the lengths to which people who “love one another” will go in this image of the separating of the sheep and the goats in the end times. In verses 35-36, how do those people behave?

b. Both the righteous and unrighteous are surprised in this story. What surprises each of them? And what does their surprise suggest about the connection between love of God and love of one another?

5. How might we apply this thinking to Luther's concept about who may flee from the plague?

Read Psalm 41

6. Psalm 41 is a prayer of deliverance from sickness.

a. What phrases in this psalm indicate that people are really not caring for this individual?

b. What hope does the psalmist express?

7. Describe a time when you or a loved one felt like the Psalmist did, whether from those who visited or didn't visit as well as your hope in the Lord.

Read Matthew 6:25-34

8a. In this portion of the Sermon on the Mount, what does Jesus teach about the worries of life?

b. Do you think Jesus would support a statement like, "I don't need to worry about the pandemic. God will protect me . . . after all just read Matthew 6?" Why or why not?

Read Romans 14:7-8

9. What does Paul write in these verses?

10. Take note of the fact that, while there is some assurance of God's presence with us in life and death in these verses, Paul writes them in the midst of a section of this letter that has to do with how we live with and love (and should avoid judging) others. Given that context, what connection would Paul make between living and dying with others and living and dying with God?

Part 2 What Does This Have to Do With My Life?

11. Fascinating that Paul writes about something that we just have lived through. What connection can you make between Luther's thinking about the Plague and the issues we have had surrounding using masks, social distancing, mandatory business closings, vaccines, etc.?