

On 10/17/89 I felt the ground giving way under my feet. I was standing in the kitchen of our home in California when a 6.9 earthquake hit 60 miles away. When we turned on the TV we were horrified to see the damage especially the collapse of a double-decker highway that I was very familiar with. While we planted a church, I drove a bread truck to make ends meet. I picked up my truck every morning at 3 a.m. and delivered bread to stores all over the S.F. Bay area before they opened. The highway that had collapsed was the one I used every morning! If the earthquake would have hit at 5 a.m. instead of 5 p.m. I may have been the 64<sup>th</sup> casualty of the Loma Prieta quake. A few months later we moved to Texas and traded earthquakes for tornadoes!

The most frightening thing about an earthquake is not just that it upsets your equilibrium and interrupts your routine, but it contradicts your assumptions. The ground beneath your feet, the very foundation of your life, suddenly gives way leaving you fearful and disoriented. That has been happening with the Coronavirus pandemic. Many of the routines that we have built our lives on are no longer reliable. School, sports, church, travel, entertainment. Our support system has collapsed. So, what do you do when the terra is not so firma anymore?

One thing you DON'T do – you don't build your life on sand. Those who build on a shaky foundation will get little sleep. Some homeowners in San Francisco have learned this the hard way.

The Millennium Tower is a 58-story condominium skyscraper in San Francisco. In 2016 the residents learned that the building was sinking and tilting. It turns out that the pilings for the foundation of the building were sunk down 100 ft. into sandy soil that has been used as landfill over the past couple hundred years. In order to secure the structure, they will have to dig down through all the landfill and get to the bedrock 250 ft. beneath the city.

If you have felt a little shaky lately, if your life has been tilting slightly or your hope sinking, let me encourage you to establish your life on some rock-solid resources that will revive your hope and renew your faith. All three sources of revival are found in John 20:19-22...

Put yourself in that room with the disciples. Their world has been rocked and their faith shaken to the core. They huddle together in a room with the doors locked behind them. But they are powerless to keep out three familiar foes – death, fear and inadequacy.

On that Sunday night, Jesus shows up with the cure for their disease - three resources, three pillars, guaranteed to strengthen their faith and revive their sinking spirits.

**Jesus overcomes death with life...Jn. 20:19a.** Jesus was alive. He even walked through the wall! How did He do that? He was sporting a new resurrection body that is not limited by stone walls and iron bars. As the disciples hid behind locked doors contemplating death, life walked through the wall.

Renewal and revival are found in Jesus because life is found in Jesus. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. <sup>4</sup>In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” John 1:1-4. Jesus came to bring us life. “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” John 10:10. There is no life apart from Christ.

If you have Jesus, then the day is coming when you exchange your aging, disease-ridden, temporary body for the same kind of glorified body that Jesus has. Your earthly body is temporary. Covid may take you out or your body may just wear out. Either way – we’re going to be out. What then? LIFE! “I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. <sup>51</sup> Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, <sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. <sup>53</sup> For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.” 1 Cor. 15:50-53

Don’t underestimate the importance of these life-giving promises. Theology matters. The church in America is ill-equipped to handle a plague. Many of us have built our lives on the same landfill non-Christians have – A 401k, a nice house, leisure, entertainment. For some, the goal of life is to keep sucking air and eating groceries for as long as we can. In my opinion, the fear of Covid is over the top. First of all, Jana and I have had it and you can survive it. Secondly, even if you die from it, that won’t be the end of your story. At the heart of Christian theology is the affirmation that nothing can separate us from life. It was this confidence in eternal life that resulted in the growth of the early church.

In 165 A.D., a devastating epidemic swept through the Roman Empire. Some historians suspect this was the first appearance of smallpox in the West. The disease was lethal—as many contagious diseases are when they strike a previously

unexposed population. Historians estimate that a quarter to a third of the population died from it (the Antonine plague). At the height of the epidemic, the death rate was so high that the emperor Marcus Aurelius (who subsequently died of the disease) wrote of caravans of carts and wagons hauling out the dead.

A century later came another great plague (the plague of Cyprian). No one knew how to treat the sick. Most didn't even try. The typical response was to avoid contact with the afflicted - social distancing. In fact, victims were often thrown into the streets, where the dead and dying lay in piles. In a pastoral letter written during the second epidemic (ca. 251), Bishop Dionysius described the scene: "At the first onset of the disease, they [pagans] pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead and treated unburied corpses as dirt, hoping thereby to avert the spread and contagion of the fatal disease; but do what they might, they found it difficult to escape."

The early Christians took a different approach. Christians cared for the sick and an enormous number of lives were saved! Simply providing food and water increased the chances of recovery. And many did recover. Sociologist and religious demographer Rodney Stark claims that death rates in cities with Christian communities may have been just half that of other cities. Because of a far superior survival rate, the percentage of Christians in the population increased substantially as a result of both plagues. Armed with the promise of eternal life, early Christians overcame fear and showed mercy. This fact did not go unnoticed by non-Christians. It is one of the main reasons Christianity flourished during the first four centuries of its existence. It could happen again if we focus on life and not death.

**Jesus overcomes fear with peace...Jn. 20:19b-21a.** In Phil. 4:7, Paul describes the peace of God as something that "surpasses all understanding." This peace does not have a human source. It is God's peace. Jesus promised to send the disciples the Holy Spirit. He said, "the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." John 14:27.

Jesus is not telling the disciples to create their own peace. If I could be at peace by a sheer act of my will then I would never worry. But peace isn't something I find within myself. It is something that must come from outside of me. Peace is not the absence of something but the presence of Someone. And that Someone is the Holy Spirit. That is the third pillar Jesus provides for His disciples.

**Jesus overcomes feelings of inadequacy with the Holy Spirit...Jn. 21b-22.**

What was Jesus doing when He blew on them? He was reminding them of Genesis 2:7. “Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” Just as God breathed life into Adam, Jesus was breathing life into His disciples. He had said, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.” Jn. 6:63. The Holy Spirit provided life and peace and power to overcome their inadequacy. “As the Father sent me, I am sending you.” In Acts 1:8, Jesus promises them power. “You shall receive power.”

We face a life or death choice - we can trust in ourselves to find life and peace in these troubled times or we can trust in the Holy Spirit. “For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.” Ro. 8:6-13

Some of us have been exposed TO the Coronavirus but all of us have been exposed BY the virus. This plague searches us all. It reveals in us either the way of the flesh (self-preservation) or the way of the Spirit (self-giving sacrifice). As the Father sent Jesus, He is sending us to reach out to our neighbors. (next series).

The sinking sand of this world is a constant reality. So are the storms that reveal it. Disasters shake us to the core and intensify our sense of mortality. But they also intensify opportunities to display a countercultural outlook and an authentic faith. Just as the church rose to the challenge in the second century, winning many to Christ, we can do the same today. Don’t allow the fear and despair that has surfaced in our country determine your outlook. Ships don’t sink because of the water around them. Ships sink because of the water within them. Don’t let what’s happening around you get inside you and sink your hopes and dreams. Set your feet on the Rock and you can look forward to life and peace in the Holy Spirit.