



CHRIST'S CHURCH  
OF THE CANYON

Week of March 29, 2020

Dear Christ's Church of the Canyon,

On Sunday, March 1, 2020 the sermon addressed the issue of Lent: *what it means, its history, and its application to us as modern-day followers of Christ*. The upshot of the sermon was that it's imperative that during the days leading up to Easter, the resurrection of Christ our focus must be on what God wants not on what we want. "Not on what we want", *doing without*. Isn't it interesting, I mean the whole coincidence of the arrival of "the bug" during Lent and believers from far and wide "doing without?" Without our favorite paper towels! Without 2-ply toilet paper! So we do without. Without going to restaurants. Without going to shopping malls. Without spending time in groups. Without going to church. And, how are we doing, *going without*? If we get stuck on the "going without" part the focus is where? It's on ME. But, if we use this time and instead of focusing on what we can't do, remember that was the front part of the sermon, and maybe if we use this time to focus on the latter part of the sermon and focus on God during this time of Lent, man think of how that will accelerate our walk with Christ? Not dwelling on the things we don't have but focusing on the relationship we do have with the One true living God?

Pr. Wayne

- I'm sending along an article that may be of interest to you by N.T. Wright
- Please send prayer requests and short testimonials about connecting with your neighbors (**Reaching across the Street**) to Sandra (Sandra@christchurchofthecanyon)
- Sunday's sermon will "frame" passion week (Holy week) for us and lead us into the resurrection of Christ
- You can give on-line or by check (*as many of you are continuing to do- thank you!*)



CHRIST'S CHURCH  
OF THE CANYON

P.O. BOX #1747 WRIGHTWOOD, CA. 92397

## Christianity Offers No Answers About the Coronavirus. It's Not Supposed To

N.T. Wright

March 29, 2020, 5:00 AM PDT

For many Christians, the coronavirus-induced limitations on life have arrived at the same time as Lent, the traditional season of doing without. But the sharp new regulations—no theater, schools shutting, virtual house arrest for us over-70s—make a mockery of our little Lenten disciplines. Doing without whiskey, or chocolate, is child's play compared with not seeing friends or grandchildren, or going to the pub, the library or church.

There is a reason we normally try to meet in the flesh. There is a reason solitary confinement is such a severe punishment. And this Lent has no fixed Easter to look forward to. We can't tick off the days. This is a stillness, not of rest, but of poised, anxious sorrow.

No doubt the usual silly suspects will tell us why God is doing this to us. A punishment? A warning? A sign? These are knee-jerk would-be Christian reactions in a culture which, generations back, embraced rationalism: everything must have an explanation. But supposing it doesn't? Supposing real human wisdom doesn't mean being able to string together some dodgy speculations and say, "So that's all right then?" What if, after all, there are moments such as T. S. Eliot recognized in the early 1940s, when the only advice is to wait without hope, because we'd be hoping for the wrong thing?

Rationalists (including Christian rationalists) want explanations; Romantics (including Christian romantics) want to be given a sigh of relief. But perhaps what we need more than either is to recover the biblical tradition of *lament*. Lament is what happens when people ask, "Why?" and don't get an answer. It's where we get to when we move beyond our self-centered worry about our sins and failings and look more broadly at the suffering of the world. It's bad enough facing a pandemic in New York City or London. What about a crowded refugee camp on a Greek island? What about Gaza? Or South Sudan?

At this point the Psalms, the Bible's own hymnbook, come back into their own, just when some churches seem to have given them up. "Be gracious to me, Lord," prays the sixth Psalm, "for I am languishing; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror." "Why do you stand far off, O Lord?" asks the 10th Psalm plaintively. "Why do you hide yourself in time of trouble?" And so it goes on: "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me for ever?" (Psalm 13). And, all the more terrifying because Jesus himself quoted it in his agony on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalm 22).

Yes, these poems often come out into the light by the end, with a fresh sense of God's presence and hope, not to explain the trouble but to provide reassurance within it. But sometimes they go the other way. Psalm 89 starts off by celebrating God's goodness and promises, and then suddenly switches and declares that it's all



CHRIST'S CHURCH  
OF THE CANYON

P.O. BOX #1747 WRIGHTWOOD, CA. 92397

gone horribly wrong. And Psalm 88 starts in misery and ends in darkness: “You have caused friend and neighbor to shun me; my companions are in darkness.” A word for our self-isolated times.

The point of lament, woven thus into the fabric of the biblical tradition, is not just that it’s an outlet for our frustration, sorrow, loneliness and sheer inability to understand what is happening or why. The mystery of the biblical story is that *God also laments*. Some Christians like to think of God as above all that, knowing everything, in charge of everything, calm and unaffected by the troubles in his world. That’s not the picture we get in the Bible.

God was grieved to his heart, Genesis declares, over the violent wickedness of his human creatures. He was devastated when his own bride, the people of Israel, turned away from him. And when God came back to his people in person—the story of Jesus is meaningless unless that’s what it’s about—he wept at the tomb of his friend. St. Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit “groaning” within us, as we ourselves groan within the pain of the whole creation. The ancient doctrine of the Trinity teaches us to recognize the One God in the tears of Jesus and the anguish of the Spirit.

It is no part of the Christian vocation, then, to be able to explain what’s happening and why. In fact, it *is* part of the Christian vocation *not to be able* to explain—and to lament instead. As the Spirit laments within us, so we become, even in our self-isolation, small shrines where the presence and healing love of God can dwell. And out of that there can emerge new possibilities, new acts of kindness, new scientific understanding, new hope. New wisdom for our leaders? Now there’s a thought.



**CHRIST'S CHURCH**  
OF THE CANYON

P.O. BOX #1747 WRIGHTWOOD, CA. 92397