

## A Pastoral Response – Novel Coronavirus

Jan 30, 2020

Dear Church,

We are writing about the recent outbreak of the novel coronavirus. As we receive inquiries from brothers and sisters, we would like to address not only the practical and preventative response to the virus but also the spiritual posture that we take. In the midst of this virus, we declare, as Paul did, that nothing can separate us from God's love:

*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*  
-Romans 8:38-39

No powers on earth, even the coronavirus, can separate us from God's loving care. That is why our first response in light of this sickness is to invite God's *shalom*, a peace that transcends all understanding and guards our hearts and minds (Philippians 4:7).

We know that there is much information about novel coronavirus available online, particularly through social media. Unfortunately, much of that information is not accurate and is causing unnecessary fear in our community. It is critical that we make decisions with information that is accurate and based on medical science. Please refer to the most recent updates from Vancouver Coastal Health [www.vch.ca](http://www.vch.ca) and the BC Centre for Disease Control [www.bccdc.ca](http://www.bccdc.ca).

Health authorities have also made it clear that the best defense against any cold and flu virus is proper respiratory hygiene. This includes proper hand-washing with soap and water and covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. If you or your family are displaying any signs of a cold or flu, we recommend that you stay home. If you have recently arrived from China, it is recommended to stay at home for 14 days.

As we stay vigilant to protect ourselves from the coronavirus, how shall we stay vigilant in prayer?

In Exodus, recall that plagues from God were striking Egypt, such as infestation of locusts and festering boils. In the final plague on the firstborn, God gave a command to Moses to celebrate the Passover by putting the blood of the lamb over the houses of the Israelites, so that death would pass over them. In other words, they were protected by the blood of the sacrificial lamb.

While this was an extraordinary moment of redemptive rescue in Scripture, we see that this is actually our inheritance as Christians belonging to Jesus, because he is the perfect, once for all sacrifice who makes us holy (Hebrews 10:10). Not only does Jesus cleanse our sin, but He is also our Healer, the Great Physician (Luke 5:31-32). In this time, let us plead the blood of Jesus

Christ, the lamb of God, to cover over our families, and over our church, so that we may be delivered from the disease that is the coronavirus.

*Father God, replace our fear with faith.  
Holy Spirit, replace the darkness with your light.  
Jesus, replace the sickness with your healing.  
Amen.*

Let us not only pray for protection over ourselves, but also pray for those who are sick and at risk. As we see throughout history, Christians were always the first to respond to the sick, which is why the early church developed the hospital in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The sociologist Rodney Stark notes that the early church was known for their care of the sick during the great epidemic around 260 AD, and that even the Roman Emperor Julian urged pagan charities to match the loving charity and virtue of the Christians.

As we pray for our families, our church, and the nations, let us call upon the name of Jesus, the name that has power to heal and to save (Acts 3:6; 16:31). Let us pray for those in China those who are battling disease, those who are trapped in isolation in their homes, those who are separated from their families, and those medical personnel who are treating the sick.

*Lord Jesus, you are the Great Healer!  
We call upon you in this urgent time for your healing, shalom, and deliverance.  
In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

In Christ,

Bishop Silas, Pastor Josh, Pastor Ignatius, Pastor Lucy