

We Will Not Be Victims

1. Warm-up Question: How was your life affected by coronavirus this past week?
2. In preparation for Sunday's sermon, Jeff asked God, "What do you want to say to our congregation in a time when the coronavirus crisis makes it so easy to feel helpless and fearful?" The answer that came back loud and clear was, "Tell them: We will not be victims!" To which Jeff asked, "What does it look like for us 'not to be victims' in this current crisis?" In reply, God laid three specific exhortations on Jeff's heart – the first of which was inspired by Sunday's scripture. Read Acts 6:1-7.
 - a. This is a story about the earliest Christians in the very first Jerusalem church. Due to persecution and social isolation, it wasn't easy for church members to make ends meet. Those who were most vulnerable – especially widows – began experiencing food scarcity. Have you ever been in a situation where you didn't know where your next meal would come from? If so, what did that feel like? If not, how do you imagine it would feel?
 - b. There were two primary factions in the first Jerusalem Church: Aramaic-speaking Jewish Christians (Hebrews) and Greek-speaking Jewish Christians (Hellenists). All the power positions in the Jerusalem Church were occupied by Hebrews. That, coupled with cultural and linguistic barriers, resulted in Hellenist widows suffering the most from lack of food. In response the Apostles appointed a special "ministry team" to focus on the Hellenist widows. Note what verse 7 says. What might have happened to the Jerusalem Church if it had not responded as it did? What's the significance of verse 7 for our church in a time like this?
3. A few days ago, someone in our congregation told Jeff that, due to the coronavirus scare, her work as a pet sitter was drying up and she was scared she wouldn't be able to make ends meet. Then someone else in the congregation emailed and said, "Do you know of anyone in our church family that is self-quarantined? I would be glad to bring them groceries if needed." Those communications, coupled with the foregoing scripture, sparked an idea. We should do in our time what the first Christians did in theirs. Not being a victim in this time of crisis means: **Point 1 – We've got each other's back. No one in our congregation will go without food.**
 - a. Jeff suggested we call this new initiative "Operation Loaves & Fishes," harkening back to when Jesus multiplied the bread and fish to feed 5,000 people, with extra left over. How do you feel about this new ministry? Do you think it's something our church should do? How do you think it will affect the spirit of our church?
 - b. During this current crisis, what are some scenarios that could cause LifeJourney congregants to experience food scarcity?
 - c. There will be two primary teams within "Operation Loaves & Fishes" – a team of Providers (who can afford to buy an extra bag or two of groceries occasionally when they go shopping), and a team of Deliverers (who take the groceries to the

door of those in need, while keeping a safe distance). Do you feel called to be one or the other (or both)? If so, why? What about this calls to you? (To participate, go to www.LifeJourney.church/loavesandfishes.)

- d. Jeff said, “Some of our neighbors will also face food scarcity, as well as people in the neighborhoods around our church. If we pull together, just like in today’s Bible passage and last week’s Gospel story (where Jesus fed 5,000), there will be more than enough to ensure no one in our congregation goes hungry, with enough left over to help many others not yet part of our congregation.” How do you feel about us sharing our food program with those who aren’t congregants?
4. Not being a victim in this time of crisis also means: **Point 2 – We will stay connected to each other.**
 - a. Genesis 2:18 says, “It is not good for the human to be alone.” Hebrews 10:25 says, “Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together.” Both verses remind us that, next to food, our deepest human need is companionship. When in your life have you felt most isolated and alone? How would you describe that feeling?
 - b. During the coronavirus crisis, we have many opportunities to still connect: Sunday 11:00 am Facebook Live Worship, Oasis Meetings on Zoom, Wednesday Prayer Meeting with Deacons on Zoom, LJC Facebook Page for Families with Children, LJC Parents Support Group on Zoom, and Dinner Church on Zoom. How has it felt to you to gather for Facebook Live Worship on Sundays?
 - c. How has it felt for you to gather in our Oasis Group on Zoom?
 - d. Are you feeling connected to your church family? Why or why not?
 5. Not being a victim in this time of crisis also means: **Point 3 – We will face our fears – and face them down.**
 - a. Reflecting on his experience as a political prisoner, Nelson Mandela once said, “I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.” What insights do you gain from that quote?
 - b. What do you fear most in this time of coronavirus crisis?
 - c. Jeff said, “Don’t let fear steal all the beauty out of your life over the next few months. Focus on the good. With each negative thought, keep bringing yourself back to something you’re thankful for. Train your brain to dwell on the positive. Learn that you are greater than your circumstances.” Evaluate that statement. Do you agree or disagree – and why?
 - d. Jeff said, “Our church will get through this and be stronger than ever. You too will come through this and be stronger.” How might our church grow stronger through all this? In what ways might you personally grow stronger?