

Dear brothers and sister in Christ,

This coming Sunday, April 19th, will mark the 50th anniversary of my Confirmation. I have to admit that my Confirmation day seems like a life-time ago. I can't believe that it has been fifty years. I also can't believe it has only been 50 years! It was a time long ago and so far away now.

When I was confirmed, I received the gift of a *Lutheran Book of Prayer*. That little red book has been part of my library, with different amounts of use, over those 50 years. I pulled it off the shelf the other day, as I knew that it contained various prayers in times of national calamity: times of war or threat of war; in a national crisis and calamity, and in an epidemic. I'm going to include the prayer below—just know it is in older, King James style English.

My little prayer book is by no means the only one with prayers like this. I have other prayer books—some of which contain prayers from throughout the history of the church. They all have prayers for times of war, disaster, fear and uncertainty, as well as prayers in the face of pestilence or epidemic. The truth is, the Church and its people in every age have had to face things like we are facing now. They have struggled and been burdened by the reality of the world around them. Yet no matter how dark things seemed, they always had the sure and certain hope that we have as God's people. It is the hope of grace through Jesus Christ. It is the hope of a love that cares for us and provides for us. It is the hope of the Lord who is the ultimate Master of all things in heaven and on earth.

I know that more than a few people have pointed to the words of 2 Chronicles 7:13-14 as we face these days. God does tell Solomon: *“When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”* (2 Chronicles 7:13-14, ESV)

We are called to pray. When you pray the prayer below (and I hope you will), you will see that it seeks to bring in all the elements of what God says to His people through Solomon. How blessed we are when we come before our God with humble hearts and pray! Luther teaches in the introduction to the Lord's Prayer what it means to pray, “Our Father, who art in heaven”. He says: *With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.* (SC, p. 237) . That is why we pray, dear people loved by God! We pray because we have a loving Father who promises to hear and answer our prayers, in accordance with His good, loving, holy will.

We are grateful for the many members who joined in our Holy Week prayer vigil. We know that there are many who continue to pray for one another, for our land and for our church. I have been comforted through your prayers, and I hope you are comforted in knowing that we all pray for you, our dear brothers and sisters in Christ. I don't know what God has planned for us, but I am sure of this: as we pray, He hears and answers in the love He has for us as His dear people, redeemed as His own, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Keep praying! God is faithful, and He will hear and heal. He has promised it in Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

Your fellow servant in prayer, through Christ,
Pastor Bode

From the *Lutheran Book of Prayer* (published in 1951)

HEAVENLY Father, I beseech Thee to turn from me and from my fellow men the destruction and terror of this epidemic. I pray Thee, stay the hand of the Angel of Death as he proceeds from dwelling to dwelling. I ask Thee, above all, to draw me closer to Thee as Thy chastening rod afflicts us. Grief-stricken and fearful, let me not despair of Thy mercies. Grant me the grace in humble repentance and sincere faith to look to Thee, who turnest all things to the good of them that love Thee. Grant the necessary wisdom and success to those who strive to stem the tide of affliction, and quicken our hearts to bear the burdens of one another's grief and need. Lord, in Thy mercy save us. I am mindful of my many shortcomings and transgressions. Blot them out that I may find peace and rest for my soul. Make me sure of my salvation through Thy Word. Then give healing and relief according to Thy good will in Christ Jesus, our Lord and Redeemer. Amen.