I preach this morning in the name of God, the Father, the + Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

So today is the fifth Sunday in the season of Lent, the fifth Sunday in which we continue our journey with Jesus that will eventually lead us to a bloody cross on Good Friday and an empty tomb on Easter Sunday. What a joy it is to come into your home today! What a joy it is to declare the good news of Jesus Christ that is with you and that is for you. What a joy it is to quiet our lives down, to center ourselves in Word and sacrament, and to hear the proclamation of God's love for you.

We continue as a nation to navigate through uncharted waters, waters through which we have never navigated before. The coronavirus, COVID-19, is sweeping across the land, breeding fear and anxiety and worry in the hearts and minds of people. It has captured the hearts and minds of people, but as the children of God, we are the ones who receive God's peace. As the children of God, we live not in fear, but in the love and the promise and the ability of the Holy Spirit to well out in us the promise of God.

We navigate through uncharted waters, but I want to encourage you today: God is with you and God is for you. You see, at a time of crisis we can either turn to God or we can turn away from God. We can either choose to walk with Him or we can choose to walk away from Him.

I heard a story of a missionary couple who took many African pastors and brought them over to the United States. On their day off, the African pastors wanted to go shopping, so the missionary couple gave them their blessing to go and shop, and they were released to go and spend their time shopping. The missionary couple knew that the pastors would probably get lost on their day...
off, so they also gave them their phone number because they knew it was very likely that the pastors would become lost. It wasn’t even an hour before the phone went off. The missionary couple picked it up and an African pastor on the other line was saying, “Help me! Please help me! I am lost!” So the missionary couple instructed the pastor, “Now go to the end of the road, and at the end of the street, look up, and tell us what two roads you see and come back and tell us.” So the African pastor went to the end of the road to look, and he saw two words. He called back to the missionary couple over the phone and said, “All I see is ‘Walk’ and ‘Don’t Walk.’”

Isn’t that where we are today? We are at the intersection in this crisis. Where do we walk? Where don’t we walk? How do we respond to this crisis? What do we do? How do we process through the rapidly changing information that changes every hour of every day. As every moment the news conference adjusts the data that we hear, how do we reflect the love of God? How do we go and do church in a world where the physical buildings are no longer available for us to meet? Well, I can tell you that in the midst of a crisis there is only one thing I know to do, and that is to turn and trust. Turn to Jesus Christ and put your trust in Him.

And that’s what our lesson is about today, it’s about trusting in God. So I invite you to take out your Bible, we’re going to be in Psalm Chapter 91, verse 1, “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.’”

When you don’t know what to do, trust in God. When you find yourself at the corner of “Walk” and “Don’t Walk,” trust in God. You see, there’s a great promise here for you. For the Psalmist writes in verse 1, “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.” Dwell means “to sit in” or “to abide under” and “to rest within.” To sit with, to remain, and to abide with, that is what it means to dwell. The presence of God, the shelter of the Most High God,
the One who is seated in all the glorious realms of heaven, invites you to dwell in Him in this season of worry. To dwell in Him, to abide in Him, to remain connected to Him.

Dwelling in God is resting in the power of God. Paul said to the young pastor, Timothy, in 2 Timothy, chapter 1, “God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, a spirit of love, and of a sound mind” *interpretation of 2 Tim 1:7). Dwelling in the presence of God is resting in the power of God, and resting in the power of God is living in the strength of the Holy Spirit. It’s living in the protective hand of God's mercy upon your life.

I remember as a young boy going on walks with my family, especially on vacation. I loved family walks, especially at Lake Erie on a sunny day. I loved it because I was a shadow chaser, I loved to chase after shadows. We would oftentimes walk around the Lake Erie Pavilion, go down to the dock and watch people fish, and watch boats. Eventually, we would end up at the ice cream parlor (imagine that on a sunny day!), we would go and have a nice ice cream. And I remember, I was always fascinated with shadows and I always felt so safe if I could stand in the shadow of my father. I always felt so safe if I could chase after my dad's shadow and find peace and rest there. I always felt so strong, and that's exactly what we need. The promise of God is: those who rest in Him, and in the presence of God, will rest in the strength of the Almighty, in the El Shaddai - “the God who is powerful”, the God who is with you, and the God who is for you.

When you don't understand, trust in God. Why? Because He will save you and deliver you, verse 3, “Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.”

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Psalm 91
March 29, 2020
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When you don’t know what to do, when you find fear in your life and you find anxiety out of control, when you find your heart racing and you’re not sure where to go, “Where do I walk? Where don’t I walk? How do I respond?” When you don’t understand, trust in God because He will save you and deliver you. He will save you from the fowler’s snare, the prowling reality of the evil one who is, John tells us in the Gospel of John, the tenth chapter, out “to steal, kill and destroy” \((\text{Jn 10:10})\) from your life. God’s power is greater because “He who lives in you is greater than he who is in the world” \((1\text{Jn 4:4:})\).

God will save you from the fowler’s snare and God will deliver you from the deadly pestilence. For as Jesus said to His disciples in Luke 10, verse 19, the power of the Most High in you gives you “the ability to trample on scorpions and snakes and to overcome the power of the enemy.” When you are afraid, trust in God because He will save you. So call out to Him today, call upon His name. He will deliver you from the deadly pestilence because you are in the hands of your Lord, the God who made you, the God who created you, and the God who claims your life in the Holy waters of baptism, and the God that feeds you with His real living presence on the altar.

Trust in God. He will save you, He will deliver you, and He will silence all your fears, verse 5, “You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.” My dear friends, that is a promise for you today, “A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand” \((\text{Ps. 91:7})\), but for those claimed by God, the power of God is greater. For those claimed in the Holy waters of baptism, God gives you resurrection power to say, “God is mine. And even though I die, yet shall I be raised again to new life!” Death is not the end. Death is only the beginning. So fear not, because the Lord, today, silences all of your fears. He silences all of them. You can trust in Him.
And there are many fears that we have, real fears. I see five main fears sweeping across our land. First, the fear of sickness: “Will I get this coronavirus?” Data records and shows us that 40 to 70 percent of us will come down with this virus. Many of us here may even have it today and not even know. We don’t know, but we’re not going to live in fear, because God’s power is greater. But that’s a real fear that we have. We need to be smart. We need to be wise. We need to do what our governors and our president are asking us to do. And we want to be smart and wise in the way in which we conduct our lives, so that we have the best interest in mind to protect others who can easily obtain this disease.

There is the fear of sickness, but there’s also the real fear of death. The real fear of death, the pending reality of death, awaits all of us in this life. Are you prepared for death? Because in death, for the Christian, is only the beginning of eternal life forevermore.

There is the fear of sickness. There is the fear of death. There is the real fear of isolation of what is to come of this social distancing and for how long is this going to go on? How is this going to affect my psyche? How is this going to affect my family? How is this going to affect my children? The real fear of isolation is real, and we want you to know that you are not alone. God is with you. And as your church family, we are with you here today. It’s real, the fear of isolation, especially for those who were already vulnerable before the coronavirus began to sweep across the land.

There’s also the real fear of financial and economic loss. We’ve already lost so much money. Our stock market has been as low as it’s been in years. But yet, may I remind you, there is nothing in this life that we can take with us. Only the God who lives in us, who saves our life, only the relationship that we have with our Heavenly Father will last in this life. Everything else will come to nothing, it will all go away. We have come into this world with nothing and we will leave this.
world with nothing, so don't fear the economy going down and asunder. Don't fear the loss of your money because God is the Sovereign Lord still in control. He is the God who is still in control. Do you trust Him today?

That's a real fear that we have - the fear of financial loss. But then there's, finally, the fear of fear itself, which in definition is the reality of the unreasonable. The reality of the unpredictable. The reality of the unknown. We don't know what's ahead of us, but we do know who does: God does and we can trust Him. When we don't know what to do, trust in God because He will silence all of your fears.

But if you find yourself today at a place of fear, call out to Him because He's already calling out to you, verse 14, "'Because he loves me,' says the Lord, 'I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.'" When you don't understand, trust in the Lord for He will silence all of your fears. And if you find yourself today with fear, call out to Him because He is already calling to you.

This week I got a phone call on my cell phone and I put it over to my voicemail. I didn't want to take the call at the time, I was busy doing some things that I thought were more important. So I forwarded the call to my voicemail and I did eventually call the person back, about 30 minutes later. So, if that person was you ("Hey, I called you this week. That was me!") I did call you back within 30 minutes, but I was convicted after our conversation. And this is what I heard the Lord say to me, "Now is not the time to silence the phone. Now is not the time! I am speaking to my people; I am pouring out my blessing; I am pouring out my promises upon my people. I am calling to my people each by name, and now is not the time to silence your phone." Now is not the time to begin to put that call on hold, to put it over to your voicemail. Now is not the time to take that call at a later time. For the God who loves you is the God who is calling you today.
Don’t silence His call! He is calling you today. Today is the day of salvation; you’re not promised tomorrow. Now is the time to take the call of the Holy Spirit.

So how is the Holy Spirit speaking to you? How is the Lord calling you by name? This may be the last hour and you are not promised tomorrow. Call upon His name because He is already calling out to you. He is already reaching down into your mess, into your situation, into your heartache, into your pain. He is already reaching out to you. Will you reach your hands up to Him and say, “Abba Father, I need you in this moment. I am desperate for you, Jesus. I choose not to put my call on hold, to forward it over to my voicemail, I choose to heed the voice of the Lord.” Will you choose, today, to heed the voice of the Lord?

My dear friend, God is calling, and He’s calling you. When you don’t know where to turn or what to do, “Do I walk? Don’t I walk?” He’s calling you to trust, to trust in Him. For when you don’t understand, trust in God, for He will save you and deliver you. When you don’t understand, trust in the Lord, God Almighty, who will silence all your fears. And when you don’t understand, trust in the Lord, and call out to Him because He is already calling out to you.

Amen