

Yesterday while working in our Archives library (by myself, respecting the need for social distancing), I found these pages of prayers written for our Lititz congregation during the time of a cholera epidemic. It seemed to me that our spiritual ancestors were speaking across the centuries, joining their prayers with ours in this time of danger and uncertainty. Pastor Roy Ledbetter kindly did a quick translation so that I can share them widely. The language is that of nineteenth century devotion, not twenty-first, but the expressions of faith and trust are as meaningful for us today as they were to the villagers of nearly two centuries ago. May these words from the past give us hope for the future.

Special Church Prayer in the Time of the Cholera---
from the Lititz Congregation Archives

[p.1] “Lord, Lord God, You are our Refuge forever and forever, therefore we raise our hands to You and draw near to You with our prayers, not because of our righteousness because of Your great mercy. O Lord, do not deal with us according to our sins nor reward us according to our misdeeds! Forgive us our guilt and be gracious unto us. You are our Father and Redeemer, that is Your Name from of old. When sorrow or trouble is there, You recall your mercy. You are the Lord, the true Master, Who is always ready to help all those on Earth. Our times are in Your Hands, Life and Death are in Your Power, You let the children of humanity die and say unto them, “Return, you children of humanity.” You let them flow there like a stream, and we are like the grass that blooms in the morning and then is cut down in the evening and withers.

It is because of Your graciousness, O Lord, that we are not consumed, while You have afflicted others most heavily with a difficult plague and continue to do so, you continue until now graciously to preserve us. O let us commend ourselves fervently to Your Mercy and almighty Help, and especially all those in our dear land who still are sighing under this difficult plague. Turn to them in grace and, as Your righteous judgment passes unstopably from land to land, let all the inhabitants of the earth humble themselves beneath Your powerful Hand and let them consider what will be best for them.

[p.2] O Lord, we humbly pray You not to let the angel of destruction raise his hand against us although we richly deserve Your displeasure, rather take us and our loved ones into your holy protection.

None the less, Lord, Your Will be done. Let us recall that “even in the midst of life, we are surrounded by death.” Teach us therefore, O Lord, to consider that we must die, so that we may gain a heart unto wisdom. Grant that we may pay attention to Your wise voice with which You call us from the sleep of sin or the laziness of security so that we may uprightly confess our transgressions and believe firmly on You, the true and only Reconciler of Millions, comforted by Your Death and Resurrection, and urged by Love to submit ourselves entirely unto you and Your service and will as long as we shall live. And so grant us, free from the torturous fear of death, to be found prepared at Your signal to lay aside our mortal tabernacles and to surrender our immortal souls into Your hands with the glorious hope of eternal life.

Hear our prayer, O Lord, for the sake of Your never-ending Love and Mercy so that we may praise Your holy Name in the Church which waits for You and also with the hosts of the Church above, from eternity to eternity. Amen.”

[There was a deadly cholera outbreak throughout the country in 1848-49. Thousands upon thousands died. This prayer from a Lititz pastor might originate from that time]
Translated by Pastor Roy Ledbetter, presbyter Fratrum, St. Louis. 21 March,2020