Anybody remember “Snowmaggedon” the giant blizzard that hit Western PA in 1993? It hit on a Saturday evening with about 24 inches of snow as I recall. So the Clerk of Session out in Hickory gives me a call and says, “Should we cancel worship?” We agreed we should cancel Sunday School. However, I was a young whipper-snapper, wet behind the ears, know it all Pastor then, and I said—ABSOLUTELY NOT. We will not cancel worship! If I have to snow shoe over to the church and preach to an empty sanctuary and if the organist can’t make it, I’ll play the kazoo for the hymns. She wisely said, “Well, let me canvass the session and see what they say.” I said, “Fine, I’ll call KDKA and let them know we’re cancelling Sunday School. So I got the nice woman from KDKA television on the phone and I said that we wanted them to announce we are cancelling Sunday School and she asked what about worship. I said, “we’re not cancelling worship”. And she laughed uproariously over the phone at me. And she said, “Well, we’re only announcing the things that are open in Western PA and as of right now you would be one of three things open in the Pittsburgh area.” So I called the Clerk and she reported that the session was of a mind to close the church and the one elder had indeed snow shoe-ed over to the church to report that there were already 6 foot drifts in the parking lot. OK, the session is always right...

Our scripture from the Least Favorite Book of the Bible, Leviticus, is informing the people of God about offerings to be conducted in the Temple. This is the burnt offering (Leviticus 6: 8-13) The main difference about the burnt offering is that it was to be done continuously. It was never to go out. The fire on that altar was to burn 24 hours per day, 7 days per week; night and day, day after day, constant and without ceasing the burnt offering was to be a fire continually raised up before the Lord. As it says, “Fire shall be kept burning upon the altar continuously; it shall not go out.” (Leviticus 6: 13) The Lord is constant and true; the people of God are to be constant and true. He will never leave us nor forsake us; we are never to leave Him nor forsake Him. He never slumbers nor sleeps; our worship of HIM must never slumber nor sleep either. The world is changeable and malleable, it believes this today and something radically different tomorrow. It is batted around by opinion and fear and pandemonium. But the flame of the Lord God Almighty never goes out. It never ends, never ceases. The Lord is faithful and He cannot be otherwise because it is in His character to be faithful. But there was a problem that occurred in relation to this scripture in Leviticus. In 70 AD the Roman Emperor Titus besieged and destroyed Jerusalem. Within less than one biblical generation Jesus’ prophecy that not one stone would rest atop another in Jerusalem came true. And burnt offerings and sacrifices ceased in the Temple. How was the sin of the nation to be wiped clean? What blood could atone for someone’s sin and fallenness before the Lord? How could the requirement of the law in Leviticus be satisfied?

Of course, for us as Christians, the answer is that Jesus went to the cross and died and it is HIS blood and HIS sacrifice that washes us clean and makes us righteous to stand in the presence of the Holy God. He is the Lamb without blemish. He is the Paschal Lamb. He is the Passover Lamb sacrificed once and for all for our sins. What all the blood of goats and sheep could not erase, Jesus’ blood washed away once and for all. For you and for me; when we believe and trust in His name; we are washed clean by the blood of the Lamb. His blood spread upon the lintel of our doorstep keeps the Angel of Death away. It is PASSOVER. A Passover of gladness. Because of Jesus’ shed blood we are protected in this life and we have eternal life in the life to come. The Angel of Death will pass over us, in Jesus’ name.

I don’t know if you have read about this but it is utterly fascinating to me. There is a group of Orthodox Jews in Israel that since 2017 have recreated the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb on a movable altar in Jerusalem. Last
year they moved it to the Western Wall of the Temple; what is sometimes referred to as the wailing wall. And on Passover, which corresponds to our Good Friday, they sacrifice the Passover Lamb by the Temple in Jerusalem. Here’s the news story –this year, they have requested a permit to do so on the Temple Mount, the remaining stone foundation of Herod’s Temple there in Jerusalem. They want to sacrifice a lamb on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the first time it has been done so since 70 AD. This act should it be approved is filled with prophetic portent. Almost 2,000 years have elapsed since sacrifice was conducted on the Temple Mount. Israel reestablished as a nation in 1947. Amazing, miraculous, a sign of God’s covenant with His people and His never-ending faithfulness. In 1967 during the ‘67 war Israel re-captured Jerusalem, the ancient Jewish capital. Amazing, miraculous, a sign of God’s covenant with His people and His never-ending faithfulness. And now, was a sacrifice to resume in the Holy Place where it has not occurred in some 2,000 years. God’s law had spoken. God had promised. The Lord is faithful. Nothing ever changes with His covenant love and faithfulness towards His people. The fire cannot go out. The burnt offering must continue. IT SHALL NOT GO OUT.

The session has been prudently planning in relation to the news of the spreading CoronaVirus since its meeting on the first Monday of February. In March it approved its draft plan and that plan is unfolding in order to keep people and especially children safe. We will not be knee-jerk, nor hysterical. We will not be batted around by fear. Fear begats more fear; faith begats more faith. We will be measured and make our decision based upon knowledgeable sources. There is a carefully thought-through plan and we are unfolding that plan. Part of that plan is in relation to worship. If the session in its wisdom and based upon the most reliable medical sources in our area suggests that it would not be prudent to meet for worship then there is a plan. It is NOT TO CANCEL WORSHIP. It is to have “modified worship” where Pastor Scott and I and Darla would come to the sanctuary at 8:30 a.m. and the three of us would conduct worship videoed by a wonderful member of our church, Tom Evans. So you can safely worship at home, sheltered in place, and you can listen on WJPA radio, and you can live stream it via Facebook, or access Facebook at home and participate in that way. BUT we will never CANCEL worship. We will conduct worship in a different key, in a modified way, both to insure that the flame on the altar of The Church of the Covenant never goes out, but also to assure the safety of our congregation.

I remember many years ago attending a silent retreat at a Trappist Monastery, the New Melloray Abbey, in Iowa. They have worship services all day and night. The worst one for me was Matins at 2:00 am in the morning. Gee, I’m glad I’m a Protestant! And I’m not good at silence either. So there was a monk I liked, Brother Gus (short for Augustine) and I blurted out to him –“What happens if no one shows up for one of your worship services?!?!? And he looked at me like I was the stupidest person in the universe and said: “Well, GOD will show up.”

Now think about this for a minute. Hysteria will argue that we should cancel worship of Almighty God. Just close down His sanctuary and extinguish the candles and let the fire of faith die down. How entirely stupid is that? Its right up there with running to Walmart to buy up all the toilet paper. We need the Lord today more than ever. We need Him to protect us. We need His power to save us. We need the power in the blood of Jesus to be spread over us and our homes and families so that the Angel of Death passes over. Where will our help come from? Our help will come from the Maker of Heaven and Earth. This fire must NEVER go out. To worship HIM now in holiness is more essential than ever.


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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!