

June 6, 2020

Hello Brethren,

For the first time since March the 7th, all three of our congregations are going to be able to gather for Sabbath services, see each other in person, fellowship and worship together! I am aware that not everyone will be able to come back for the first few times due to various circumstances, but I know you are all longing for and looking forward to this wonderful opportunity to be together once again. We have all missed our spiritual family!!

How very different our country and the entire world look today than they did just three months ago. A virus-inspired panic swept the world, and most countries locked their borders, and to one degree or another locked their citizens in their homes. Businesses were closed (many of which will never reopen), travel of all types came to a screeching halt, tens of millions of jobs were lost and the future suddenly seemed very uncertain for much of the world. For most of the past 90 days the news has been dominated by the coronavirus/COVID-19 to the virtual exclusion of everything else.

Until about a week ago, when a Minneapolis police officer contributed to the death of a suspect named George Floyd. Cell phone video was released, and at least a portion of it aired on every TV network in the country. Overnight the news switched from a virus from China to waves of often violent protests and riots across the country. Entirely spontaneous or not, these protesters have looted and burned businesses and homes (as if the coronavirus shut-down wasn't damaging enough), burned police stations and looted patrol cars. At least 17 people have died as a result of the protests and looting, and nearly 4,000 have been arrested so far.

The United States of America is anything but united right now. People are divided by political ideologies, moral standards, conspiracy theories (of every sort and in every direction imaginable), differing ideas of individual rights and freedoms, and now intense racial tension. Suddenly everyone who was a medical expert last week is a legal or political or social expert today. Everyone seems to be shouting, and no one is listening. Meanwhile anger begets anger, hatred begets hatred and violence begets even more violence.

As I watch the news in stunned disbelief, the words to an iconic song from 1970 comes to my mind. Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel wrote and released perhaps their best-known song 50 years ago when the nation was again deeply divided. It was also a time when anger, hatred and violence were prevalent. The news at that time was dominated by the Vietnam War, campus sit-ins marches and protests, the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy, Woodstock and the Civil Rights movement. Unrest was everywhere, and no one knew the solution. In just one night Paul Simon wrote most of "Bridge Over Troubled Water," a Grammy Award winning song also voted Song of the Year.

It was an instant hit, and by the end of 1971 it had also been performed by Elvis Presley, Peggy Lee, Merry Clayton, the Jackson 5, the Supremes and Aretha Franklin. Some saw it as a protest song, or even about drugs. But it was never intended to be either. It was written in a gospellesque style to carry a different message.

It was intended to be about encouraging or providing comfort to a person or people in need. It focused on the need to have someone who will stand beside you to support and give you strength in the darkest times of life. Even the line “sail on silver girl”, which has been assumed by many to be a reference to hypodermic needles and drugs, was actually a tribute to Simon’s now ex-wife Peggy Harper, who was upset about finding her first grey hairs. He was saying that even if she were completely grey, he still counted on her for love and support, and would support her in return. (Too bad their marriage didn’t last as long as the song...).

Today “troubled water” hardly seems to encompass the terrible state of the world. And the Bible is clear that the fearsome tempest roiling the world at the moment is only going to get worse, and no one knows how to stop it. Humanity desperately needs Someone to step in with support, comfort, encouragement – and to show the way out. To provide a bridge away from the anger, hatred and violence.

You and I know that Someone quite well. And tomorrow we will be able to gather to worship Him together, looking forward to the time not long from now when He will step in to end the violence and finally bring peace.

Whatever our personal feelings may be about the myriad of issues swirling crazily around us, we need to come together with love for one another (John 13:35). Remember, love isn’t just an emotion, it’s an action. And it’s revealed in the way we encourage and support each other.

Paul wrote that the Kingdom of God is not about food and drink (Romans 14:17). If I may modernize his thought, I would say it’s not about masks, protests or political views either. We need to be focused on humbly submitting to the lead of our Father and developing His character.

One day soon the Saints of the Most High will assist our Lord and Master in providing a real bridge over troubled water to all mankind. That is our focus, our goal and our purpose.

Tomorrow my family and I are thrilled to be in Van Buren for morning services and then travel up to Bentonville for afternoon services while Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby will be coming down to Mena. We are excited to see so many of you again tomorrow!

Best regards,

Thomas L. Clark
Pastor