

## **“Under Ground Church”**

### **Message based on 1. Peter 5: 6-11**

Dear listeners,

I am drawn to the reading from 1. Peter. Peter wrote two letters which are included in the Bible. This apostle of the first hour focused quite a bit on a topic we can all relate to: staying strong during difficult times! That’s because Christians in Peter’s days were often meeting at their own peril, worshipping secretly, gathering in hiding spots. It was an underground church, quite literally. If you ever have a chance to visit the eternal city of Rome, you can visit the catacombs where some of the earliest Christians met, worshipped and prayed. Literally underground, with skeletons not too far away.

I don’t know to whom Peter’s letters were addressed, but I do know that before long more and more people read them. “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God that he may lift you up in due time.” That’s what he wrote. People then and people now ask: God, when is our due time? When will conditions finally improve? When will restrictions get lifted? When can we be a community in the fullest sense again? When can choirs sing again? Then and now, the answer to that question is not in our hands, as much as people try to rush, escape, take matters into their own hands or adopt conspiracy theories. Then and now we are tempted to think that our lives depend on the acts of governors, presidents, leaders. Peter reminds us: you are under the powerful hand of God. This crisis, as much as you think it’s all-consuming, is small on the bigger scale. We are in God’s hands. You are in God’s hands.

But let me also voice some grievances. We are allowed to grieve and complain, you know. We don’t have to suppress bad feelings, immediately reminding ourselves that we have it good after all. There is a book in the Bible called “Lamentations,” a book full of lament. Let’s be honest, we are all going through a difficult time. On this Choir Sunday we especially mourn the ability to come together, to sing, to praise God and be of one voice, to chat and be social during coffee hour, to practice the sharing of the peace, to come to the altar, to have Spark, and so much more. We and a bunch of other people...

This week I spoke to my friend Pastor Charles Quann from Bethlehem Baptist, the largest church with majority African-American members in the

area. If you know how important choirs are in the context of the black church, you will easily understand that they are hurting right now. Choirs are the heartbeat of the black church. In these times we are told that choirs spread not only joy, but also a fellow named COVID 19. During this pandemic, choirs are muted. It's sad. But Peter says, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."

These are not just pious words. Take it from someone whose life was in danger many times and who, according to the best sources we have, was eventually crucified in the city of Rome. Peter knew what he was talking about. So, in the absence of baseball, let us all be pitchers and throw our anxieties, little or small, into the outstretched glove of God.

What are your anxieties at this time? Are you worried about job security? Or struggling to get through each day's work while caring for little children? Not seeing your elderly parents who need love and care? While you are surely doing everything in your power to tend to the people in your orbit, please don't forget that God cares for you!

A final image... Peter talks about an enemy, the devil, who prowls around like a roaring lion looking to devour someone. It's a vivid image that people in those times could relate to. Some of those beasts were let loose on people in the colosseum in Rome for the crowds to cheer. In our situation it's more about a tiny virus that we can't see, wreaking havoc in our community. It takes strength, resilience and faith to get through these times. Peter says in so many words, "You already have what it takes; you are bound together in a faith that gets stronger when it is challenged, not weaker." Just as the early underground church got stronger when it was under pressure. It is times like these that reveal who we are. And so many people at St. Peter's are rising to the occasion. Thank you for your participation, your prayers, your support, your faith!

**Amen.**