

With the pandemic raging all around us, with a tangled election still in process, with racism, prejudice and poverty, there are many people who think 2020 is a difficult year to be thankful. And yet Scripture is very clear about bringing our praises to God. In Psalm 34:1, the Psalmist wrote: “I will bless the Lord at all times; God’s praise shall continually be in my mouth.” The word “continually” means in good times and in bad times—at all times!

I can honestly tell you I have never before worked during a pandemic or plague. (And I hope I never have to again!) It’s been very challenging!

But many years ago, in 1637, a Lutheran pastor named Martin Rinkart served people in the walled city of Eilenberg in Germany. It was during the 30 Years’ War. Many refugees fled to the city thinking they were safe behind those walls, but the city was overrun by enemies a few times.

The terrible living conditions—overcrowding, filth, and hunger—were bad enough. And then the plague hit. Rev. Rinkart conducted funerals for over 5000 people that year—including one for his own wife. Yet he was still able to write these beautiful words of praise that were later turned into a wonderful hymn by Johann Cruger.

Now thank we all our God, With Heart and hands and voices.  
Who wondrous things hath done, In whom His world rejoices.  
Who, from our mothers’ arms, Hath blessed us on our way  
With countless gifts of love, And still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God Through all our life be near us,  
With ever joyful hearts And blessed peace to cheer us;  
And keep us in His grace, And guide us when perplexed,  
And free us from all ills In this world and the next.

When Martin wrote “and guide us when perplexed,” he certainly wasn’t talking about minor inconveniences. All the words he wrote have a majesty and resolve that few other poems of praise have.

What he is saying is that we can thank God even during the most trying times. And we can know with assurance that God is always with us “in this world and the next.”

Will you pray with me?

Merciful God, we all know that these are terribly trying times, but we continue to see your blessings each and every day. Thank you for family and friends, for all the necessities of life, for your love which never fails, and for our Savior Jesus in whom we trust.

Deliver us safely from this pandemic, keep those we love in your watchful care, be with our church and all those who give of their time, talent and treasure to keep us going through this unprecedented time. For all these things and so much more, we give you our humble and hearty thanks. Keep a song of thanks in our hearts long after tomorrow is over. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.