



*Buon Giorno di Italia*

As I walk the quiet streets of Aviano praying and seeking ministry opportunities I am mindful of the affect the coronavirus is having on this community. As you know the coronavirus has hit Italy hard and the entire country is on lockdown. In our region, Friuli Venezia Giulia, there have been 126 cases and six deaths, few compared to those regions surrounding us (Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna and Veneto). Yesterday new restrictions were imposed in the country whereby all consumer businesses, restaurants, and places of public assembly (churches) are closed. Medical facilities, pharmacies, food stores, banks, government offices, and industry remain open. Leisure travel is prohibited as people are instructed to stay home. Needless to say, the sentiment is anxiousness and fear amongst the people. For some more than others, of course, but for all, the uncertainty and possible adverse effect on health, the economy, and the future of Italy and throughout the world preys on the mind of people.

At times Anna and I feel cut off from those in the community because of the restrictions imposed on travel and gathering. We know that people all around us are experiencing anxiety, fear and discouragement. We too feel disappointment. We were scheduled to return to the U.S. on 16 March for the birth of our second grandchild, but our trip has been cancelled and we, like others in Italy, cannot travel.

But in these times that the Word of God floods my mind with not only comfort but also direction. Verses like Philippians 4:4—*Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice.* Rejoice in the time of pandemic? Yes, the Lord says, rejoice always! Verses like Philippians 4:6-7—*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your request to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* Oh, how apropos! That is exactly what people are feeling—*anxious, worry, uncertainty and lack of peace.* And God tells us what to do when we feel this way—*pray, present our requests to God and allow His peace to guard our hearts and minds.* Sounds like a great action step to me—*along with hand washing.* Verses like 1 Peter 5:7—*Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.* There is plenty of anxiety that needs to be cast upon the Lord! Isaiah 41:10—*So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.* Plenty of fear and dismay going on. I could go on and on with verse after verse of the Lord promising us His comfort, help, strength and peace. I could go on and on with verse after verse of the Lord's principles that He is sovereign over all things. He is our comforter and sustainer; our strength and shield; our rock and fortress; an ever-present help in our troubles. He will not leave or forsake us.

My point—whether it be in times of pandemic or everyday troubles the answer is always the same. God is the source of our comfort and strength, and His Word provides the action we need to take. So rather than be anxious, pray; rather than fear, trust in the Lord; rather than be discontent, learn to be content in all circumstances; rather than be disappointed, rejoice.

Beloved, pray that we continue to have the opportunity to provide spiritual help to comfort and encourage the people in this community. Pray for the Italian people and their government as they seek to contain the spread of the coronavirus. Pray for the Christians that they will look to the Word of God for their encouragement and strength. Pray for the lost who do not know Christ that this will be a turning point in their life where they will seek God. Thank you for your partnership with us. God Bless You.

Serving Together in Christ,

*John & Anna*