

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us this morning. In Christ's name, we pray, amen.

Watching the news and documentaries on pandemics, I have a much greater appreciation for what is happening in the world than I did 3 days even ago. I can see now the handful of times this part of the world dodged the bullet with SARS, Ebola were a blessing, but that pandemics are inevitable. The only thing we really have to compare our current situation to is the Spanish flu of 1918. It was 100 years ago . . . right at the end of WWI. My maternal grandmother's family lived just outside of Boston at the time and rejoiced on November 11 when they learned their son and brother Joseph was coming home. On his way home he developed symptoms of the flu, as many soldiers did, and died in hospital overseas a few days later at the age of 22. 3 months later in Feb 1919, my great grandmother Margery contracted the virus and died at the age of 30 when my grandmother was just 11 months old. Flu pandemic has been part of my family story for 100 years. The loss of my great grandmother and her little brother left the family understandably devastated. My grandmother never knew her mother, and lived her whole life with this gaping wound that could not be mended by loving grandparents who raised her, a wonderful father who took her on adventures, and surrogate mothers. She struggled to develop meaningful relationships and when her first child was born she wasn't sure how to mother because she never had one. She was devoted, did her best . . . and really struggled. My family has seen the generational impacts of a sudden and devastating loss to a virus that left everyone helpless.

The losses are so sudden and fraught with fear and complications . . . and I heard someone say this week because sick people are in isolation, they are dying alone. It's just awful to think about. There are so many things about this that are scary and tragic. None of us wants to be here, none of us wants to be dealing with this . . . and this is the path on which we find ourselves, and so here we are walking it.

If there is a time to be well educated on current events, making good personal choices and being overly cautious with the way we conduct ourselves, this is it, because the consequences of spreading

the virus are so costly. I spoke with an Anglican colleague in Nanaimo yesterday morning, who said, you know, if we take overly cautious measures and no one in our community gets sick, we will have been successful." Instead of looking back and saying "oh, we really didn't need to do all that." We can rejoice for being successful. To cancel worship and close our building probably seems overly cautious to some, to others "better safe than sorry," and there is probably a contingent of people who believe this is absolutely necessary . . . even though it is not what any of us really want. When COVID 19 floods the news and we talk with people around the island . . . perhaps there is a moment of realization that we don't know where the virus is or how it is spreading. We don't want to distance ourselves from one another . . . and yet social distancing is the best thing we can do to protect one another. If I keep a safe distance from others and don't get the virus, I can't give it to anyone else. It's not forever, but it is a good practice right now.

We are not the first people to find ourselves longing for communal worship at a time where it is not advisable. During the Babylonian exile, when the temple had been destroyed and Jewish people were forced to live away from their homeland, there was no temple at which to gather for communal worship. So their practise became centered on the home and Rabbis developed and established the practice of Shabbat, the Friday evening meal at the beginning of the Sabbath. Today Shabbat is the most important practice in Judaism; it's like our Easter Sunday. It's people at home gathered around a meal.

Over the centuries Christian communities have experienced such persecution that they too found themselves worshipping in the home either with just the family or in very small gatherings . . . sometimes it just isn't safe to do anything else. We can imagine the intentionality put into this time together . . . perhaps it was something like what Justin Martyr, a very early church leader, described: a gathering that included a meal, prayers and readings from the Jewish prophets and "the memoirs of the apostles."

In the case of both the Jews in diaspora and Christians worshipping in secret, they tell the stories and maintain the practices that remind them of who they are. When they do not have the freedom to worship as they wish, they are intentional in their homes to remember the stories and do the things that remind them of their identity.

Today we find ourselves not gathered in the sanctuary, but in our homes. You're either watching a video or reading a manuscript of my sermon. Today it isn't a normal Sunday of showing up to church, receiving a warm welcome along with a bulletin and hymnal, and joining together in the service. Today perhaps you thought, ok I'm going to look at the bulletin, then watch/read the sermon and then read the prayers. Today you have to think about it a bit – how do I do this in my home? What can I do to make this time worshipful for me when I'm missing the energy of communal worship? Most of all today, as we worship in our homes, it's really important for us to remember who we are, so I offer you this story about Jesus from the end of John's gospel (excerpts from chapter 21):

²Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.' They said to him, 'We will go with you.' They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵Jesus said to them, 'Children, you have no fish, have you?' They answered him, 'No.' ⁶He said to them, 'Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. ⁷That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!'

⁹When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread.

¹⁵When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' ¹⁶A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' ¹⁷He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. After this, he said to him, 'Follow me.' [The disciple whom Jesus loved] is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true. ²⁵But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

This is the gospel of Christ
Praise be to Jesus Christ

This morning we remember that we are followers of Jesus; we live our lives out of his teachings; we live by the abundant good news he offers, and we do the work he calls us to. Caring for one another is one of his final commands to his followers. Today and for the next little while our work is to feed the lambs, tend the sheep . . . to care for one another and our community in a new way through this time of physical isolation. I have already received a number of ideas about how we can do this, resources we can access and thoughts about what is important in this time. Thank you for all of it and I continue to welcome your ideas, suggestions, resources, as well as messages about your needs and support you could use during this time.

As I said in my email yesterday, the council is meeting on Tuesday to make a robust plan for nurturing our community until we are able to gather again in person. While we are physically separated in this time, we are not lost, for we are found in Christ Jesus; And we are not alone, for we live in God's world.

We believe in God:

who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus,
the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others
by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church:

to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,

to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death,

God is with us.

We are not alone.

Thanks be to God.