



May 14, 2020

Dear Grace Church Community,

It has now been more than eight weeks since we began to take very seriously this novel coronavirus. We have stayed home as much as possible, washed our hands with a new vigor and vigilance, and are beginning to wear masks around our nose and mouth when we go out around others. Schools are closed. Shops for the most part are closed. Many of the daily rituals and joys that we considered to be a necessary part of our lives have either come to a standstill or have changed in almost unrecognizable ways. Church buildings continue to be closed while ways of gathering through Zoom and Facebook Live are becoming more common. Even though it is not the same, having the opportunity online to see each other, worship with each other, and visit with each other brings great delight. It is an affirmation that despite the world being turned upside down, the church is still alive and well. God is in our midst and God continues to show the church how to be active in the world.

But the voices are rising. What next? When will things begin to reopen? The word “normal” is being floated as if what we will experience once it is safe to come together again will be “normal.” Bishop Doug Fisher recently sent out a pastoral letter to the churches in the Diocese of Western Massachusetts telling us that our church buildings will remain closed until at least July 1. His letter was titled “Love of our Neighbor Guides our Way Forward.” And then yesterday, Dr. Anthony Fauci and Dr. Robert Redfield, the nation’s top infectious disease experts, predicted “dire consequences” if we reopen our communities too quickly, reminding us that we are a long way from coming together in large groups.

This makes each of our hearts break. It causes each of us to worry about the future. The virus is causing tens of thousands of deaths and climbing, tens of thousands of health consequences that are only coming to be known, and the economic devastation of millions. And almost every study shows us that if we loosen our restrictions to gather, that a resurgence of COVID-19 cases will occur causing further disruption.

As people of the resurrection, as people who place their trust in God, we are uniquely prepared for this time.

First, we are equipped to navigate uncertainty. When God liberated the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt, their route to freedom was neither direct nor apparent. For 40 years they wandered in the wilderness, living by faith that God would lead them to the land they were promised. In this desert season, they learned patience, they learned faith that God would provide enough. They learned that hoarding and greed would not serve them. God would give them enough manna and water to sustain their lives.

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In this wilderness time, we can draw on our faith and our confidence that we are not alone because we have a provider who is good. In this difficult and unpredictable time, we can encourage each other and share our persistent hope for the future. As community we can be there to hold each other and help each other take the next step when the way forward can seem overwhelming and capricious.

We are guided by love of neighbor. Over the past weeks we have seen people protesting the restrictions of their states. Some of them are armed and angry. And while they may be justified in their fear, our faith does not allow us to consider only ourselves at the expense of the community. Jesus tells us that the greatest of the commandments is to love God and to love our neighbor. In any consideration to reopen our buildings, the love of neighbor, in particular those most vulnerable, must be our highest consideration.

We are a people who are encouraged to find opportunities for gratitude. “This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.” Though each of us are eager to physically hug our children and grandchildren, reunite in person with friends and family, and sit in restaurants with each other enjoying the sights and sounds of joy; our identity as people-- first formed in the struggles in the wilderness and later by the death and resurrection of Jesus—has been shaped when our lives are not as we would have chosen.

Today, as followers of Jesus, we can celebrate small moments of beauty, kindness, and gratitude in a world that feels chaotic. Today we can love a neighbor by calling someone just to check in. Today we can support a friend who is feeling economic anxiety. Today we can participate in God’s goodness by putting a sign outside our door thanking the delivery person. Today we can support a local business by ordering takeout for dinner. For each of us there are so many ways that we can remind ourselves, and be a source of, love in the world in these difficult times.

This Saturday, we are taking a bite out of COVID-19 by celebrating. We are inviting each of you to celebrate the ministry of the Rev. Jen Bloesch. At 1:00 PM this Saturday, May 16 we will gather on Zoom with our brothers and sisters across the Episcopal diocese and United Church of Christ church to give thanks that Jen is among us, sharing God’s love with the world, working in creation to provide food for our hungry neighbors, and providing a safe place for our children in the Berkshires to learn, and work, and share their own gifts. Let us strike a note for joy in this time. A worship bulletin for Jen’s celebration and installation will be included in the Zoom invitation for you to participate in the service. I hope to see you there and at worship on Sunday at 10:00 AM.

May the peace of God which passes all understanding be with you,

Janet