

March 16, 2020

Friends in Christ,

Since COVID 19 has been declared a Pandemic “the feel” of our daily lives has begun to change rapidly. Weeks lie ahead of us where we can not be sure of how the Pandemic will impact us.

This can lead to fear and anxiety. 2 weeks stuck at home? Favourite activities cancelled?

Should I visit my family or even let them visit if they come from an area where the virus is present?

This can weigh heavily on our souls. Plus, some of us may experience immediate financial problems as a result of the crisis. Our “normal” day to day worries have not stopped either...

This is why you need to know: Your minister has not stopped being there for you. I am there for you more than ever in this crisis. It is easy to give me a phone call or to send me an email. Then we can connect . I want to hear from you.

I will keep you updated by a weekly email, and I will photocopy the email for people who have no computer and work on a delivery system, even if we should have no worship services. We will also work on a “buddy system” and phone chain and you will hear more details after the Board meeting on Friday of this week. Be assured:

Care and prayer will continue. At the heart of our faith is the care for self and others. At the heart of our faith is courage to be kind, and trust in the one who stills the storm. We will cultivate Calm and kindness my friends.

And....

This is an opportunity to think outside of the box.

With every great challenge there is also great opportunity.

The type of response we are seeing now, on all levels of society, guided by government, is the type of response the world should have engaged in to prevent the worst of the climate crisis., This virus is helping us all realize how we are connected and are in this together and how we can do things differently. When you are sad about not flying somewhere think about the rest the atmosphere is getting.

Think about rest, think about Sabbath, when you are sad about activities and meetings getting cancelled. Think about sea and forest, Think about where you might walk a bit and breathe the fresh air. Come, drop by and walk on my forest paths in Round Hill if you need a change of scenery. I am only a phone call away.

Read the Sabbath poem:

*Pandemic*

*What if you thought of it  
as the Jews consider the Sabbath —  
the most sacred of times?*

*Cease from travel.*

*Cease from buying and selling.*

*Give up, just for now,*

*on trying to make the world  
different than it is.  
Sing. Pray. Touch only those  
to whom you commit your life.  
Center down.*

*.  
And when your body has become still,  
reach out with your heart.  
Know that we are connected  
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.  
(You could hardly deny it now.)  
Know that our lives  
are in one another's hands.  
(Surely, that has come clear.)  
Do not reach out your hands.  
Reach out your heart.  
Reach out your words.  
Reach out all the tendrils  
of compassion that move, invisibly,  
where we cannot touch.*

*.  
Promise this world your love —  
for better or for worse,  
in sickness and in health,  
so long as we all shall live.  
— Lynn Ungar 3/11/20*

The outdoors are there for you. The air is fresher without so many planes in the air and with less cars going to events. The wild geese are back, soon gardening season will start. Fresh air is healing for you, moving out of doors will strengthen your immune system and the virus does not like fresh air anyways. Drink lots of water, laugh, make phone calls, rest, rest and include our spirituality in your daily doings. We live in a world where many are starved for rest and solitude. Look at this as a blessing. Find the blessing in this situation and blessings will be multiplied.

Biblical Reflection on the gospel:

Brief reflection on the rich young man, today's Gospel.

As if Covid 19 was not enough, we must get in today's gospel reading one of the most challenging messages that Jesus ever pronounced.

Who among you does not recognize yourself in this charming young man? Age aside, he represents what many of us aspire to: A good life, the kind of life which, when we stand before the judgement throne, can get divine stamp of approval. Who would not like to hear that "well done, good and faithful servant"? Many of us have not murdered, lied, defrauded someone in business, committed adultery and have not treated our parents disrespectfully. And if we aspired to this, but failed at some point, we regretted it deeply and made amends.

Most of us want to be and are "good people", just like the young man.

But then there is the question of the "more", the "extra mile" the full commitment to the way of Jesus.

And this is where many of us stumble and withdraw, just like the young man.

Jesus is asking him to give up control over his life. Jesus is asking him to follow. To leave his life of privilege behind. To give his money to those who need it most, and then to go with him into a completely unknown future of service to others. That is too much for him. That is too much for most of us. Passages like these give a bad conscience. What kind of a Christian am I if I'm not Mother Teresa or Francis of Assisi? Well some have called these and others like them the only Christians.

They did exist. They do exist. Perhaps more frequently than we think have women and men found and find freedom in the move to leave all personal privilege behind and to engage in full time service to others.

Just think of monks and nuns over the centuries. This is what you do when you join a religious order: Your personal wealth becomes communal wealth. You give up control over your life and surrender to God's will. Just as an example, the Jesuits motto is "magis" which is latin for "the more" the "greater" way.

This order of priests is based on the choice Jesus asked the young man to make: In every situation they ask themselves: what is the extra mile I (we) may need to go here?

Pope Francis is a Jesuit. The first pope to take serious small steps to redistribute Vatican wealth to the poor.

But for many of us, that door is open only a tiny crack. We do stand before the idea of selling what we have and giving it to the poor like the camel before the needle's eye. Too strong we feel the responsibility for our dependents: Our children may need the money we save, our community needs us, we may not have that much in the first place, we can't imagine what good it would do to give that much away.

I'd like to say a few encouraging things to us, including myself:

Jesus LOVED the young man, it says. He loved his sincerity and his desire to grow in faith. Why else would he have asked what he needs to do? Nowhere does it say that he stopped loving him after he walked away. On the contrary, he still loved him. When a son or daughter of yours chooses a path you feel is below their potential, or not up to what they could be or do...do you stop loving them?

So Jesus still loves you.

Would Jesus not love any sincere person no matter how imperfect?

Yes he would. He does.

The young man's response is sadness. That too I cherish. He grieves...he is not angry at Jesus, nothing like that. He grieves because he has many possessions which make it so difficult for him to let go of them.

That too seems to me like a very humane and sincere response....but you know, who says that that was the end, once and for all? Perhaps he needed time?

Who says he could not have been one of the many who, after Easter, laid their wealth at the feet of the apostles to be used for the common meals and the care of those without support or income?

Imagine his future, friends. He was young. What might his later years have looked like as someone who chose to follow Jesus?

[If you were to write another gospel story about him, what would the story be? Think on that this week, would you? And if you like to write, send me part two of the gospel by email. I am looking forward to these submissions. ]

We live in a challenging time. Sometimes the best thing we can do if we don't know what to do, is to become still, and calm, and listen intentionally and intently. Open your heart to God in prayer. Ask for guidance, ask for help with a decision. Stay open to the signs, know that there is always a step that leads to deeper love, and deeper joy.

We like to hear stories of people who became extraordinary disciples, but at the same time these stories make the people who are at the center of them feel so unreal that the stories don't really challenge us. Take the slave trader John Newton whom we know as the author of "Amazing Grace". He didn't immediately reform his life as a slave trader after he swore to God that he would better his life if only he and his ship would survive a terrible storm. But he began to read the bible, and gradually began to have more empathy for his captives. Popular versions of his story have him reform immediately, but it was not until over 25 years after the storm event that he wrote a pamphlet that openly and sharply condemned the slave trade.

His letting go of a "business" that was lucrative but horrendously cruel took time.

For everyone of us letting go of what gives us power and control and wealth is super hard, and doubtlessly its the harder the more we have of it... So it was very hard for Newton despite his good intentions.

And it was not easy for the young man in the gospel and it is not easy for you and for me. But until we breathe our last breath the door to the next step of a closer walk with God is always a crack open!

"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that  
saved (a wretch like me) and set me free,  
I once was lost but now I'm found  
was blind but now I see"....