

Shepherd's Voice



April 2020

“Everything has changed, except for one thing...”

By Pastor Scott Searl

One of the most remarkable outcomes of our current situation is how clearly it is burning away the chaff of daily life. For most people, everything has changed. School has ended for the time being. Dining out has ended for the time being. Work has ended for many, and maybe not just for the time being. Daily routine has come to an end, for the time being. All this being heightened by the evil specter of job loss, illness and death... 651 people died on Sunday, March 22nd in Italy. On Monday March 23rd, the brother of Lt. Gov. Peggy Flannigan died in Tennessee of Covid-19. Everything has changed.

We are in a moment of complete disruption. Last weekend seems like a millennium ago, and no one knows what tomorrow will be. Even the most informed among us is struggling to imagine what two months from now will be like. A new age has dawned... A new way of being has broken into the world. It came without our desire. It came without our bidding. It came beyond our control. When things return to normal, it will not be normal... it will be a new normal, and it will take years to figure out what that new normal is.

And, strangely this evil has brought us together. Separated physically, but emotionally together in our separation. Not everyone is equal, but everyone is at home. Everyone in the whole world was just sent to their respective corners...

It's odd to think that this worldwide evil has given us this strange sense of unity. How could evil do that? At the same time, it's odd to realize that the singularity of the cross and death of Jesus had a similar effect for some. The cross was and is evil... yet somehow it was and is unifying. When seen through the lens of resurrection, and the hoped-for promise of eternal life it is everyone's future. If we all trusted in the empty cross and empty tomb more clearly we would live more generously and with more humble kindness. It would completely disrupt our world and our lives.

This is exactly what happened to Paul in the cross of Jesus. For him and for others a new way of living broke into the world. A new way of valuing things came into being. A new way of being came into being. And the values and goals of normal life got turned upside down and inside out. Jesus' death on the cross was a disruptive moment that for some, changed everything about their daily life.

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Deacon	Brian Henning
Faith Community Nurse	Kaye Wothe
Administrative Assistant	Shawn Wacholz
Building Manager	Blair Prax

Church Council Members / Officers:

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Vice President	Julie Luers
Treasurer	Steve Hanneman
Financial Secretary	Julie Luers
Secretary	Adam Driscoll
Service	Nate Lichty
Worship & Music	Allie Jensen
Building & Facilities	Peter Barott
Learning	Joan Dillon
Growing Relationships	Robin Beck
Caring	Gretchen Marble
LMCC	Open
Evaluation	Chris Polston

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Directions	2
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Pastor Scott Searl	12
Pastor Sherri Lawrence	13
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Emergency Message Mailbox	24
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If the worst of humanity craved power, Jesus came in the weakness of a baby. If the worst of humanity craved money, Jesus came in poverty. If the worst of humanity was selfish, Jesus came in self-giving. If the worst of humanity was to be famous, God came in obscurity as a lowly first century middle eastern peasant with brown skin ... a nobody among the who cares. If the worst of humanity demanded that some must be kept out, Jesus was found among the outcast. If the worst of humanity proclaimed that some must starve to death, Jesus would die so that all might live. What humans so crave; God humiliates in humility.

Let me be clear, the virus is evil. Death is not God's way of doing business, rather God's business is defeating illness, job loss and death. But somehow God does seem to be at work through and beyond the evil. The cross was and is evil but somehow God went through it and beyond it to reveal God's love. This virus is evil, and people are dying. And we are called to pray that God would deliver us from this evil.

At the same time, it is okay to notice what chaff is being burned away for you right now? What has this disruption revealed about yourself and your family? What values are left over? On the first Easter morning, all the chaff of Jesus' life had been burned away. And when Jesus finally appeared to those who had betrayed him and deserted him, he loved them. The only value that remained for Jesus after the life disrupting event of the cross was love. And love for all, especially love for you. Everything has changed, except for one thing... Love.



**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
LEADERSHIP TEAM UPDATE**

The next steps for the Community Leadership Engagement Team (Kathy Weimer, Julie Luers, Hilary Nelson, Chris Polston, Todd Biewen, Pastor Scott and Jim LaDoux) is to

- 1) compile the data from our 3 question survey centered on the key areas/ issues of Affordable Housing, Equity and Inclusivity, and Support for Youth/ Young Adults.
- 2) have a discussion focused on what we consider our signature events and who we'd like as our primary community partners. Answer the question, "Who do we wish to partner with more intentionally and for what reasons?"

As always, we'd love to hear from the congregation. So feel free to stop any of the members listed above and share your ideas or comments.



PRESIDENT'S POST: Finding Strength in Faith, Family and Friends

By Todd Biewen, Church Council President

COVID-19 is here, and so are: Social distancing, 14 days of self-quarantine, Face masks, Binge buying of paper products, Governor's Executive Orders, Virtual business and social meetings, On-line schooling, People out-of-work, Stores closed, Services disrupted, Vacations cancelled.

Yes, COVID-19 is here. What is going on? How did we get here? When will things return to normal? These are the questions I keep asking. COVID-19 is here and it has thrown our best laid plans to the side of the road. I have to admit this is not easy for me. I am frustrated by it. I'm used to being in some semblance of control in my life. My routines are gone and I feel helpless.

For our family, 2020 is a year with big plans. Our youngest child is a senior in high school so we've been anticipating a final high school baseball season, senior prom, many good times with his friends, and a graduation in June. Then, our daughter is to be married in California in July and our son is to be married north of Seattle in August; the venues are booked, the planning continues. And finally, in September we will send our youngest off to college. Then Cindy and I will be empty nesters.

Those plans are my story. What is your story? I know you all have stories too, and yours are very important to you and are disrupted by COVID-19 just the same. I pray that we can all find a way to live out our plans. In our case, we know there will be a graduation and two weddings. We know there will be college in the Fall and we will be empty nesters. The details may change, but we will find a way to see them through.

For now, to stay safe we are all being directed to keep our distance from one another in order to prevent spread of the disease. And, we especially need to protect those who are most vulnerable from being exposed to the virus. This is why I'm thankful for the response Shepherd has had in the face of this most unusual situation. Pastor Scott, Pastor Sherri, Deacon Brian and all the staff have shown amazing resourcefulness and creativity in this unprecedented time, finding ways to connect us, to care for us, and bring us together for worship.

As quickly as life has changed because of the virus, I feel my attitude is changing almost as rapidly. Over just the last few days I've begun to relax into this temporary new normal. I'm getting comfortable with working from home and worshipping from home. I'm seeing how this is a time that calls for good doses of family, faith, and friends. Sure there are great challenges, but I'm also starting to see the opportunities. There is more

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President's Post continued

time at home, more card games, more movie nights, more time to talk with family. It's a time to keep a closer watch on my parents. It's a time to walk the neighborhood and appreciate all the people who are especially friendly and feeling grateful for the simple things in life.

As I said in the first paragraph, COVID-19 is here, but we can all take comfort in these everlasting truths: Spring is here, Sap is running, Soil is warming, Trees are budding, Songbirds are singing, Lake ice is melting, Thunderstorms will blow in, Gardens will bloom.

God's creation is stirring with new life. Easter is coming.

Happy Easter and Peace.
Todd



HOLY WEEK AND EASTER

For the moment, as of March 24th, we plan to host Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter services using a combination of our At Home Worship Guide and our online video / conference call in media. We are working on some special at home features to these services and we will mail and email with details as we know them! There is also a possibility that we may be able to host a "drive-in" Easter service in our parking lot... but those details are still being considered and worked out. So stay tuned to our website, Facebook page and your mailbox for more information as available.

Staff Reflection

Believe and Trust continued

4) Mediation or listening: We often neglect this important piece. Take 5 minutes to sit quietly and breathe. Try to quiet your inner voice and just listen.

5) Go for a prayerful walk: Remember that all of creation belongs to God. Think about the air we breathe and the ground we walk on, about the flowers and trees and birds.

6) Pray a movement prayer: Stretch up to the heavens and touch your toes. Feel the brilliance of God's creation, of you, and the way your body has been put together by God. Rejoice in it.

7) Be thankful: Each day, make a list of everything you encounter that you are thankful for. At the end of the day, incorporate that into a prayer.

I am so grateful for the community here at Shepherd, for the staff and for all who I have met or spoken to on the phone. You can contact me via email at sherri.lawrence@sothchurch.com or call me at 612-251-1342 if you would like to connect. I look forward to the times when we are together once again. What a celebration that will be!

Peace,
Pastor Sherri



BELIEVE AND TRUST

By Pastor Sherri Lawrence, Associate Pastor

I could never have imagined that my first call to ministry would start out with all of us being isolated and distanced from one another. In a time where I was looking so forward to meeting you and getting to know you, to my ordination and installation, to a new home and a wedding, now seemingly all needing to be put on hold.

There are so many layers to work through right now in each of our lives. Layers of grief, not only of those we love, those we cannot see right now, but also things we have lost; the closing of businesses, schools and churches, just to name a few. We have feelings of uneasiness, restlessness and anxiety. We feel a bit out of control with our futures, and we wonder if anything good will come out of this.

I believe and trust there will.

I believe there is good in the midst of evil. I believe that when all of this is over (which I'm hoping will be soon!) that we will be a closer and stronger community than we have ever been. I believe that we will know the meaning of what is important in our lives, that it is not the stuff that we have, but the people we have around us. I believe that our children and our children's children will know what being connected means and will long for a physical connection rather than a social media one. And I believe in a God that is with us in our isolation and that we are truly never alone.

As I write this, I don't know at what stage we will be when you actually read this, for every day there seems to be a change. I pray that you hold fast to your faith in God, that you continue to connect with family, friends and church through technology and that you are taking care of yourself, each other and your neighbors.

I came upon an article as I was looking through my files this week that I would like to share with you. It is called "7 Spiritual Practices for the New Year", and I think it is relevant for the time we are in. It may help you to gain a new perspective of yourself, those around you and God during this time.

1) Pray at different times during the day: you may notice that you pray differently in the morning, afternoon or night.

2) Laughter and rejoicing: These are so important! Put on your favorite song and dance, sing loudly, have some fun! Tell each other jokes and give thanks to God for giving us humor.

3) Love yourself: It's okay and not selfish to do this. Spend a few minutes writing what it means to love yourself. Remember that God loves you.

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I HEARD THE VOICE OF JESUS SAY

By Deacon Brian Henning

I think I've said this or written this about a million times now, so please forgive me if I am repeating myself. It strikes me that this pandemic has come to us in the middle of Lent.

What is Lent? Well, historically in the church it is a time of fasting, reflection, reorienting, and preparation. We do all of these things to make

sure that we are prepared to witness the story of Holy Week again. Holy Week is a challenging time to exist as a person. The story of Holy Week is hard to hear year after year after year. Yet, it is the story of our God and of our existence is the creation of God.

If we were to compare our world today to the story of holy week I'd say we are probably in the night time between the last supper and the day before the trial. As I write this I cannot help but think then we had our last supper the day before the lockdown and isolation occurred. But, as I write this we are not quite at the peak of everything happening. We are in the middle of it all and Jesus is praying to let this cup pass from us. So we are actively witnessing the holy week story in our daily life while at the same time preparing to hear it again in the church. We are fasting from our daily lives, we are reflecting on the world and our roles in it, we are being re-oriented every minute of every day, and we are still preparing for the worst of the pandemic to hit our country.

As I think about all of this I am often at a loss. During these times there are many things that I like to turn to to help keep me grounded in my faith. One of those ways that I like to keep grounded is through music. As I was listening and playing music I came across the hymn, "I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say." The version I listened to is the Lenten chant version, ELW 332 if you have a hymnal at home. The first verse goes like this: 'I heard the voice of Jesus say, "Come unto me and rest; lay down, O weary one, lay down your head upon my breast.; I came to Jesus as I was, so weary, worn, and sad; I found in him a resting place, and he has made me glad."

I think it's safe to say that we are all weary, worn, and sad right now. I think it's safe to say that we should be heeding our Savior's call to go to him and find our resting place. True, we might have homework to do or chores to accomplish or we might just be finding anyway to keep busy. But, Jesus is still calling to us. Perhaps, Jesus is particularly calling to us. Perhaps, Jesus is making this season of Lent and this time of distancing an opportunity for us to actually be closer than ever before and I think that if we were to listen and to heed the call, we will see that will never go back to the way things were before.

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I Heard the Voice of Jesus continued

Our hymn closes with this verse: "I heard the voice of Jesus say, 'I am this dark world's light; look unto me, your morn shall rise, and all your day be bright.' I looked to Jesus and I found in him my star, my sun; and in that light of life I'll walk till traveling days are done."

This hymn reminds me that in the midst of the darkness and death, we can sometimes find the most purest sense of joy. We are reminded what really is important and are called to let go of the things that keep us bound to the ways of life which do nothing, but hurt and oppress. I pray that as you live through these next weeks or months that you might find the rest you have been needing and will find your star and sun again. I pray that we allow God to transform us and that we might feel the call to go and walk in that newfound light once more... the light of a crucified and risen Christ. I give thanks for you, your presence, your life, and every way you show God to all.

WITH THANKS!

Dear SOTH Confirmation Families and all,

While this is not really how I pictured my time ending here at Shepherd from a communal standpoint, it is exactly how I pictured it ending with the arrival of Pastor Sherri. Since you have been in pastoral transition, I have been serving in the role of confirmation teacher for the past seven months. It has been my joy to spend time with the middle schoolers for our confirmation retreat, the Moonlight Madness all-nighter and our weekly Wednesday confirmation get-togethers in “the basement”. We had good intentions and began one-to-one mentoring during Lent that lasted two weeks prior to our COVID-19 shut down and social distancing. The students’ curiosity and energy about life is infectious (in a good way), their care for each other is admirable, and it’s just fun to see this community of young people come together each week.

I am especially grateful for our confirmation volunteers; high school student Louis Nelson, along with Tom Sheldon and Elissa Marble as they have been literally shepherding small groups throughout this time and will continue to do so with Pastor Sherri going forward. I am also grateful for your partnership in ministry and encouraged by your faithfulness and your sense of community during this challenging time we are all navigating together. Peace be with you and I thank you for considering me a partner in this journey.

What’s next for me you may ask? I have a full-time job as service-learning project manager for the 2021 ELCA Youth Gathering which will be held in Minneapolis for 30,000+ high school students. Additionally, I am finishing teaching a spring course on Christian Public Leadership at Luther seminary

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FEAR NOT!!

By Kaye Wothe, Faith Community Nurse

These words are repeated many times in the Bible.

And yet here I sit on March 19th, 2020, with a lot of fear.

The Covid-19 virus is ramping up all around us. I am exhausted trying to balance not adding to panic and convincing people it is time to stop, stay home and realize everything you do impacts so many others. Wow, that is a lot of fear. A level of fear that is exhausting, produces frustration and struggle.

Does God really mean not to fear now??

As Lent teaches me every year, WE ARE EASTER PEOPLE. It seems so ironic that this Covid-19 crisis has happened during Lent.

Every day, every time, I read the news or view a website I need to counter it with a “fear not” from God (which is not the same as “go ahead and do what you want”).

We need to take care not to characterize hardships as challenges sent from God, but rather remind each other that if God was willing to send His Son through the horrific journey of Lent and to the cross for our forgiveness of sin and redemption, God is not going to leave us. God will give us life and help us work through difficulties.

As Easter people who cling to God’s promises, I wonder if we can approach these hardships with hope and as challenges to work through with discernment from God.

David Lose, Luther Seminary professor, President of Luther Seminary in Philadelphia, author and now ELCA Lead Pastor at Mt. Olivet, has published some thoughts on this I want to share with you below. His three points are: “First, fear is, in many ways, the antithesis of faith.

Second, courage is rooted in God’s promise.

Third, fear of conflict may be one of the most debilitating of all fears.”

Fear and faith are opposites in the sense that embedded in faith is trust. When we are controlled by fear, are we trusting? I do not trust easily and I certainly can get to fear, then need to remind myself of my faith and the trust I am not accessing. I have to have daily touch with God, His word and promises to keep it front and center. Many days I fail, but I keep trying.

God’s promises are meant to give us courage to live, act with confidence in our faith and be our inner compass when we use our faith to discern our actions.

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Conflict, whether in our home, our community or in the world, is very scary as is fear for our life, health, livelihood. We need be honest about these fears, talk about them and find places of peace in these moments of time. We need to be connected to God's promises.

Lose says: "God who never, ever ceases to surprise us. Are the hardships we face things to fear or opportunities to exercise our faith."

So, I wonder if that's part of the nature of our life in Christian community: to remind each other that while God may be so much bigger than we'd thought, and that while the life of faith may be at times much harder than we'd bargained for, God will not abandon us. Not to the tempestuous storms of life, or even to the gale-force winds of our fears. Rather, God will come, stilling wind and wave, calming the fear-ridden heart, telling us again that we are God's own beloved children, and calling us to greater faith.

And when we do that—comfort each other with the news of God's steadfast love—we are playing one of the great roles described and assigned throughout Scripture. For at critical moments across the biblical drama, apostles, angels and prophets will be sent to the people of God to say these four powerful yet simple words: Do not be afraid. And each time we say and hear these words, we join all those saints before who, caught up in the Spirit of God, find the courage not just to survive, but to flourish; not just to live, but to live with abundance; and not just to get by, but knowing the favor we enjoy in and through Christ, to dare great things, expect great things, ask for great things, and share great things.

So, I wonder if we could not only admit the power we sometimes give over to our fears, but also—and more importantly—play the part of apostle and angel to each other by having them turn to each other and say: 'You are God's beloved child; do not be afraid.' It's a small thing, I know, but it gives us a chance to practice one of the important elements of the Christian faith: kindling through word and deed hope and faith in each other. For these—hope and faith—are not only at the heart of the Christian faith but are, ultimately, the only real antidote to fear."

The good news is that even the very real fears we face do not need to define us, for love and hope we have through faith is ultimately so much greater than fear.

Finally, one of our biggest antidotes to fear is to bring in prayer our fears, anxieties and concerns to God, trusting in God's promises. After all Easter is the display of God's ultimate promise to His people.

HE IS RISEN!!! Alleluia! Alleluia!!

Easter Blessings!

Kaye Wothe, Faith Community Nurse

With Thanks continued

I work a few hours at the Minneapolis Area Synod. I will office occasionally at Shepherd just to get out once life gets back to whatever normal will look like.

Again, thank you for welcoming me into your community of faith during this time. Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid, do not be discouraged. For the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9

Peace,
Kris Bjorke

WoSOTH BOOK CLUB

Sunday, April 26 at 4:00 pm
Meeting on-line!!

Book: "The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane" by Katherine Howe
Details will be forthcoming. Please contact Kaye Wothe if you are interested in taking part in an on-line book club.

Summer 2020 - (date TBD)

Book: "This Tender Land" by William Kent Krueger

MENTAL HEALTH CONNECT

**HOW DO I CONTACT A NAVIGATOR
FROM MENTAL HEALTH CONNECT
IF I NEED HELP?**

Call 612-312-3377 and ask for Mental Health Connect staff or call 952-212-8051 to reach a navigator directly.

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