



1 April 2020

Brothers and Sisters in Christ;

The last couple of weeks has been incredibly difficult for all of us. For many of us we attend Church most every week. For some of us Church is where we gather for worship, for communion, for fellowship, for study. The season of Lent began with some new challenges...interpreting Ash Wednesday through United Church lenses. The service in the morning was familiar to me, a traditional Anglican Ash Wednesday service and there were a fair few at Christ Church. The evening Service at Knox United was completely new and incredibly powerful. While few in number, we were many in spirit, and I thought it boded well for how our Lenten journey together would be.

We started our Book Study on The Last Week and it was a good sized group. Then the world changed. The news became urgent. Measures were put in place to limit the size of groups. And still we gathered. Knox United hosted a wonderful Irish Stew supper. The community responded. And still more measures were put in place to limit the size of groups. Eventually the decision was made to shutter both buildings. I know this has been difficult for you. It has been difficult for me. The best part of my week is Sunday, when we gather together. Handshakes, hugs, "how have you been?" Gathering together to hear the word of God. To pray in God's name, to hear how God is moving through us in the world. It seems like so long ago.

And yet, with the wonder of technology some of us are able to gather through Zoom. Knox United has worshipped twice in a virtual capacity. Christ Church has worshipped once in a virtual capacity. And while we are far from perfect, we are making do, and learning new ways to "be Church" as we go forward in this difficult time.

Rest assured, I am praying for you. For each and every one of you. And I thank you for your prayers. Many of you have received a phone call, checking in. Most of us are practicing physical isolation (I prefer that term to social isolation). Self-quarantine. Staying home unless absolutely necessary. That needs to continue if we are to flatten the curve and be able to join together again as a Parish family.

I invite you, every Sunday, at 10:00 am to join me for worship. For those of you with access to technology, you will receive a Zoom invitation. For those of you without technology, I have a way we can join together, even though we can't see each other.

Just before 10:00 am light a candle and find a comfortable place to sit. If you wish, pour yourself a cup of tea or coffee. Put a blanket over your lap or around your shoulders and close your eyes. Breathe deeply. Then, if you wish, open your Bible to one or more of the readings on the enclosed list. Ruminate on what you've read. Think of how that reading relates to today. Again, breathe deeply.

Close your eyes and pray. Pray for your neighbours, for those who are on the front line in the health care industry. Pray for those who are working to stock the shelves, grow the crops, pump the gas, clean the streets and make our drive-thru coffee and tea. Pray for your families and friends. Pray for yourself. Pray for our Anglican Bishop Lynne McNaughton, our Primate Linda Nicholls and our Regional Dean Yme Woensdregt. Pray for our United Church Regional Minister Kathy Davies, our Moderator Richard Bott, and our Regional President Jay Olson. And finally, please pray for me.

Until we are allowed to gather in person we will not be able to receive the sacrament of the Eucharist or Communion. And while that is a hardship, imagine how incredible it will be when we are able to take the bread and the cup again.

We will recognize Holy Week as the Church. We will recognize Easter as the Church. Yet it will be in ways we have never experienced. I am convinced that once we are allowed to gather again, that first Sunday back will be our true Easter, as our Parish will then be Resurrected.

It is important to realise that our Parish does not worship Christ on the cross. We worship before the empty cross and the empty tomb. While this may seem to be a dark night of the soul; a wandering in the wilderness; perhaps it is a time of discernment. A time to dream. A time of wonder, joy and hope. I believe that the Church will re-emerge after this is over renewed. We will focus on what is important and we will have grown beyond our physical boundaries.

Our Church buildings may be empty, but WE are the Church. And we can be the Church from a kitchen table, an office desk, a comfortable chair. We can be Church from our front porch, balcony or deck. Whether we connect virtually or simply by thinking of one another at any given time, we REMAIN the Church.

Please know I carry you in my heart. I am continuing to work, in a different way, through this time of physical separation. I go into the Churches at least once a week, to work, to worship (alone) and to pray. And I will continue to do so until I am ordered not to, or the time comes we are able to gather together, in person, once more. I am learning more about technology than I ever imagined I would want to. With email, Zoom, Survey Monkey, Facebook, etc. And with the telephone.

If you are in need of prayer, or are having a tough time and want to chat, please give me a call at 250.430.7970. I cannot promise I'll answer the phone when you call, but I promise I will call you back. From my home to yours, I wish you a very Happy and peace-filled Easter.

Your servant,