

March 29, 2020

Dear Friends,

It is Sunday morning. Instead of leading a discussion in Sunday School about grace and preparing for worship, I am sitting on my couch next to the open window. The sun is shining after 24 hours of showers and thunderstorms. I feel the gentle breeze. I hear the birds singing their morning praises and off in the distance is an owl reminding us we are not alone. And every once in a while, I hear the sad song of the mourning dove in the trees.

Before me on the table are pages of notes and calendars preparing for the recordings we will do for Holy Week making sure I don't schedule multiple Zoom calls (again). My prayer list in my *Moravian Daily Texts* is spilling over onto sticky notes. I feel the weight of making decisions that affect others. Do we do drive-in worship or on line? How do we balance the tension of virtual Communion? How do we minister to our people during the most sacred Holy Week?

My youngest child is alone at college. My oldest has moved in with me. My parents are two hours away. I have missed birthdays and celebrations. I have been banned from visiting our members who are also isolated from their family and friends. I have friends in dark places, who long for reassurance, for touch and my heart aches for them.

I share these thoughts because I know I am not alone. I know we are struggling with this together while remaining separated. We are struggling and we are grieving. Our people are struggling and grieving.

We grieve the plans we have made that are now put on hold. We grieve the celebrations, birthdays, anniversaries, new births we cannot attend. We grieve who have died and the funerals that must wait. We grieve with and for our students who are finishing out the school year in a way they never imagined. We grieve with our front-line people – people are putting themselves at risk every day to use the gifts God has given them.

And this is what it means to be church. We remain grounded in our faith. We know Easter will come with or without sanctuaries filled with flowers. We know that we will gather again eventually. We know we have technology unlike any ever before that allows us to stay connected. And so, we pivot. We find new ways of doing things. We challenge our theology and perhaps shed some adiaphora. We reevaluate our priorities, our relationships, and our time. And we continue to be church together.

One of the ways we, at St. Peter's Holgate, are doing this is through shared worship. Good Friday will continue the Stations of the Cross but for YouTube. Seven pastors (Lutheran, United Methodist and UCC) are recording portions of the service. We will edit those together and share a common worship service. Another group of ELCA rostered ministers is planning to record an Easter Vigil. We have resources overflowing Facebook conversations. New ideas, new ways continue to rise up as we work together. And, if for no other reason, it is an exciting time to be the church together for the sake of the world.

Today, our fifth Sunday in Lent text is the story of dry bones. God breathes new life into dry bones and they live! So, my siblings, know you are not alone. Know that you have people encouraging and praying for you even in the midst of grief, even when your bones feel dry. Know that even though we are not in our buildings with the people we love, God is still breathing new life into dry bones.

You are doing amazing things for the sake of the Kingdom. We see you. We hold you in prayer. We are encouraging you in this journey because even those we are separate, we are never alone.

Peace as we journey together,

Juli Lejman-Guy, President, Pastor, Mom, Child of God



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"...that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love..."
Colossians 2.2 (NIV)