

Reflections on Faith and Life for Easter 6, May 17, 2020 (covid)

PLEASE HELP US! If you have an email address, *please* share it with us! Postage and the quantities of paper and photocopying for snail-mailing these weekly worship opportunities are costly, and it looks as if we'll be continuing this practice for several more months!

In the Via de Cristo (lay-led Christian spirituality movement), there's a popular greeting: "God is good!" The people you're greeting respond, "All the time!" Back to the first speaker: "All the time," and then the second group: "God is good!" I look forward to the day when we can greet each other, in person, with those words, or with the age-old Lutheran refrain, "The Lord be with you!" "And also with you!"

Today I share portions of a summary of a "zoom" conversation between the Wisconsin Council of Churches and clergy who understand what "zoom" is and wanted to participate. (FYI, I am not among that number!) The report is based on what *should* or *may* happen **after** Governor Evers' "Badger Bounce-Back." (As I write this, I realize there may be a law-suit to overturn the "Bounce-Back" recommendations.) Following are the points that seem most significant to me.

- This "return to church" will take time, perhaps 12-18 months. Until a vaccine is found, the virus will remain among us, dangerous for all and deadly for the elderly and those with underlying conditions. Until a vaccine is found we're all in jeopardy.
- No matter what phase of recovery we are in, everyone must continue to emphasize caution, social distancing, hygiene...
- Phase 1: possibly by the end of May; restrictions will still be for groups of 10 or less. For in-person contact, masks, gloves, sanitizer should be used (will be provided for those who don't have them).
- Phase 2: **may be possible 1-2 months after phase 1.** Up to 50 people may gather with proper safety measures.
- This is what worship might look like: no more than 50 people, observe social distancing; no physical contact, no sharing of food or drink or offering plates.
- **Minimize public talking and singing.** Talking produces 10 times the droplets than come from breathing alone; singing produces 60x the droplets. Suggest recorded music, or piano or organ music only, without singing; and minimize talking of liturgy, public prayers, etc.
- The recommendation is that communion NOT be celebrated during Phase 1 or Phase 2.

Details will have to be worked out. Our congregation councils have begun discussing these and other options. What I envision is this: 1 family per pew, or 2 individuals at opposite ends of a pew; 1 empty pew between each person/family. Everyone will be masked. As Pastor, I will be the only person to speak out (readers won't be scheduled until next year). It just about breaks my heart to imagine our first service together, our Easter, without the "Easter shout of joy": "Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**"

At this point I must inform you that my projection of our “Easter” being celebrated on May 31st was premature. We will follow the guidelines of the ELCA and our staff in the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin; our number one priority is to keep people safe.

Each congregation’s website should have posted a letter from Bishop Mansholt of the East Central Synod of Wisconsin. I encourage you to read it; it contains more complete details from a “pastoral” perspective, which is, of course, where I’m coming from.

We’re hunkering down for the long haul now. Since the end isn’t yet in sight, I ask you to help me in my ministry: What do you need from me as your Pastor during our “fasting” from regular worship?

- If you feel a need to receive Holy Communion—as long as you’re not in a locked-down facility—please let me know and we’ll see if we can work it out.
- Does the format of the weekly (e)mailings work for you? Can you suggest any changes?
- If you’re feeling isolated, would you like to be part of a telephone tree and receive regular calls?
- If you need someone to do some shopping for you, let me know; several members have volunteered to pick up and deliver occasionally.
- Do you have any special prayer requests or concerns? (Remember, we can’t pray publicly for anyone without their express permission.)
- Is there anything you want me, personally, to know or to pray for?

Prayers for Times of Public Health Concern: COVID-19/Coronavirus (from the ELCA)

God, our peace and our strength, we pray for our nation and the world as we face new uncertainties around COVID-19. Protect the most vulnerable among us, especially all who are currently sick or in isolation. Grant wisdom, patience, and clarity to health care workers, especially as their work caring for others puts them at great risk. Guide us as we consider how best to prepare and respond in our families, congregations, workplaces, and communities. Give us courage to face these days not with fear, but with compassion, concern, and acts of service, trusting that you abide with us always; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Gracious God, it is good for us to gather as your beloved community. We treasure your presence with us in word and meal, song and prayer. Be with us in these days when gathering together is not possible. When we must be apart for reasons of safety, we trust that you surround us with your sheltering wings. Encourage us in connecting as we are able, reaching out to our neighbors in need and being persistent in prayer. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our constant companion. Amen.