

THE WORD FROM GILEAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
April 12, 2020; Easter Sunday, Year A

TIME FOR THE YOUNG AT HEART

Cough—excuse me! I don't want to spread my germs around. Do you know about germs, tiny tiny things that we can get on our hands, or spread to someone else when we cough or sneeze, and they can make other people sick? Have your parents been talking to you about washing your hands a lot, to keep our germs to ourselves? To really get rid of the germs, doctors say you should wash your hands for 20 seconds. I can't wash my hands with soap and water right now, but I'll rub this Purell on my hands and sing you a 20 second hand-washing song that was written by another minister: "Amazing soap! How sweet the smell, that keeps our hands germ free! Please wash your hands, and dry them, too, that we might healthy be."

Do you know why we're all staying home so much right now? To keep the coronavirus germ from spreading from one person to another. It spreads so fast, and you can't even see it moving! But you know what spreads even faster, from person to person? God's love. Which is so much more powerful than a measly germ. Just like you can't see a germ spreading when you cough, or get near another person, but it can make them feel bad anyway; praying for another person, sending them thoughts about God's love, works the same way. You can't see it moving, but it does, and it makes people feel better. The Bible says believing in God's love is believing in things you can't always see, but you can feel when they change things. Let's try it right now. Close your eyes, and in your mind, send me a prayer of love. Now imagine your parents or grandparents in your mind, and pray for them. Imagine your friends at their houses, and pray for them. And imagine everyone who's gotten sick from the virus germs, and pray for them. And now imagine your own face, and pray for you. I am. In Jesus' name, Amen.

I don't know about you, but I feel better. See? It's working! So while you're home, keep spreading the love!

GOSPEL READING Matthew 28:1-10

¹ After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." ⁸ So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "**Greetings!**" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "**Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.**"

It was in a prayer meeting with my friend Duane that it occurred to me, like I said to the kids, that the coronavirus spreads like wildfire, and infects us when we don't see it, feel it, or even know until later—may never know. And God, which is Love, is more powerful, and more infectious, than anything on earth. And that infection of love, which can spread from touching, or doing for others, or even praying and sending that energy of grace, can spread over the entire globe, from person to person, community to community, and change the world, creating a new normal. What is it they talk about when there's some kind of pandemic? Who was patient zero, the first to get it and start spreading it? It's you.

The only way to get through this challenge, this fire that is spreading, is to blow it out with the wind of the Holy Spirit. Friends, it's Easter morning. Death is always followed by Resurrection.

I'm a big believer in prayer. And while I'm a big proponent of prayer in action, since faith without works is dead—and any loving action is prayer, and necessary for our faith and spirit as well as the good of our neighbor—I'm also big on old fashioned "thoughts and prayers." Recently social media got on a case about how often we somewhat mindlessly mumble, "sending you thoughts and prayers," without actually doing anything to help the situation. But while we're stuck in our homes, and having our loving actions and Christ-like works stifled to a large extent, at least as far as what we're used to doing, at this moment I have a heightened awareness of how vitally important and real "thoughts and prayers" are.

There's a lot of good stuff happening out there. Signs of resurrection, signs of Easter amid the tomb. We're reaching out to the isolated via social media, making phone calls, sending cards and letters—and God bless the responders who are on the front lines in the hospitals, the doctors, nurses, orderlies, janitors, the transportation drivers, the garbage people, and those who are feeding the need—last Friday at the Food Pantry, a couple of guys I see regularly at our Brewster emergency shelter, which had to shut down during this time, said they've been taken in and given housing by someone during the quarantine.

When a doctor in Texas needed to isolate from his wife and child to avoid bringing the virus home to them from work, she got on social media asking if someone could offer temporary housing, and strangers offered to park their RV in the doctor's driveway, free of charge, for the doctor to live in as long as he needed. So the doctor's spouse, Emily Philips, started RVs for MDs, and of course, created a viral movement online, and within two weeks, 22,000 people had loaned RVs to first responders. That's viral Resurrection.

And it starts with hearts of love. Not church membership, denomination, nationality, or even religion. It's the spirit and energy of the God of love who lives in us all when we open to it. Prayer. Mindfulness. Breathing. Right from home. Creating space in our hearts and minds for, yes, thoughts and prayers that push out the negative

energy, and draw in, and then send out, the light. It works. Right now I'm fine. Right now I have enough toilet paper. Right now, right from my couch, I can generate love. My good friend Doris has taken to breathing mindfully when she's walking her dog, and Doris very intentionally breathes in honor of those who because of the virus, are on ventilators. Breathe for others. Viral resurrection.

You don't even have to feel anything in particular for it to work. Just say the words, just offer the thoughts. They change things, in you and the world. C.S. Lewis wrote to a relative who was about to be confirmed, and was concerned because she didn't feel what she thought she should about her faith, that feeling was unnecessary. Say the words, do what's right, and allow the grace to come. Or as I heard someone say the other day, just show up, and let God do the rest.

I don't know exactly why God allows challenges like disease and cruelty to exist, but I know where God is in these things. God is the rainbow that comes when we rise to the occasion, choose the light in the darkness, and make chicken salad out of chicken--poop. Or lemonade out of lemons, if you prefer. And here's a rainbow of Resurrection for us right now, in this breathable moment. We are reaching out to one another with greater intention. Our prayer life is stronger and more robust than ever—because it has to be. Let us take this moment in time and create a new world, so that when the pundits wonder about what the New Normal will be after the pandemic, our New Normal will be deeper and wider faith and love and connection throughout the world.

I received a terrific poem this week, How the Virus Stole Easter, a Grinch homage, by Kristi Bothur. It was emailed to me from Christine Cosmo, who said she just knew I'd love it. I did. In fact, I had had the same idea, and started working on my own Grinch poem a week ago, but was running out of time to write the thing when I got Christine's email. So thank you God, Christine, and Kristi! I'm off the hook. Here it is:

How the Virus Stole Easter

By Kristi Bothur –with a nod to Dr. Seuss (*and a couple of changes by Martin*)

- > Twas late in '19 when the virus began
- > Bringing chaos and fear to all people, each land.
- >
- > People were sick, hospitals full,
- > Doctors overwhelmed, no one in school.
- >
- > As winter gave way to the promise of spring,
- > The virus raged on, touching peasant and king.
- >
- > People hid in their homes from the enemy unseen.
- > They YouTubed and Zoomed, social-distanced, and cleaned.
- >

- > April approached and churches were closed.
- > “There won’t be an Easter,” the world supposed.
- >
- > Holy Week started, as bleak as the rest.
- > The world was focused on masks and on tests.
- >
- > “Easter can’t happen this year,” it proclaimed.
- > “Online and at home, it just won’t be the same.”
- >
- > Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, the days came and went.
- > The virus pressed on; it just would not relent.
- >
- > The world woke Sunday and nothing had changed.
- > The virus still menaced, the people, estranged.
- >
- > “Pooh pooh to the saints,” the world was grumbling.
- > “They’re finding out now that no Easter is coming.
- >
- > “They’re just waking up! We know just what they’ll do!
- > Their mouths will hang open a minute or two,
- > And then all the saints will all cry boo-hoo.
- >
- > “That noise,” said the world, “will be something to hear.”
- > So it paused and the world put a hand to its ear.
- >
- > And it did hear a sound coming through all the skies.
- > It started down low, then it started to rise.
- >
- > But the sound wasn’t depressed. Why, this sound was triumphant!
- > It couldn’t be so! But it grew—’twas adundant!
- >
- > The world stared around, popping its eyes.
- > Then it shook! What it saw was a shocking surprise!
- >
- > Every saint in all nations, the tall and the small,
- > Was celebrating Jesus in spite of it all!
- >
- > It hadn’t stopped Easter from coming! It came!
- > Somehow or other, it came just the same!
- >
- > And the world with its life quite stuck in quarantine
- > Stood puzzling and puzzling. “Just what can this mean?”
- >
- > “It came without bonnets, it came with no bunny,
- > No pretty pink dresses., cantatas, or money.”

"It came without peeps, and no flowering crosses
Amid unemployment, and stock market losses
No green plastic grass, No colored egg searches
It came in their homes, when they lost their churches."

>

> Then the world thought of something it hadn't before.
> "Maybe Easter," it thought, "doesn't come from a store.
> Maybe Easter, perhaps, means a little bit more."

>

> And what happened then? Well the story's not done.
> What will YOU do? Will you share with that one
> Or two or more people needing hope in this night?
> Will you share from the source of your life in this fight?

>

> The churches are empty - but so is the tomb,
> And Jesus is victor o'er death, doom, and gloom.

>

> So this year at Easter, let this be our prayer,
> As the virus still rages all 'round, everywhere.

>

> May the world see hope when it looks at God's people.
> May the world see the church is not building or steeple.
> May the world find Faith in the LORD's resurrection,
> May the world find Joy in a time of dejection.

> May 2020 be known as the year of survival,
> But not only that - > Let it start a revival.

And let me add just one more couplet--
Don't ever give in to the world's downward spiral.
We were handed a virus. Let's make Easter go viral.
Amen.