



'Till We Meet Again!

Week of March 29, 2020

REFLECTION FOR FRIDAY MARCH 20, 2020

Romans 12:9-13

⁹Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹²Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. NRSV

We have all heard the saying, “when life gives you lemons, make lemonade” and that really struck me yesterday as I walked around my neighborhood with my dog. Boy, life sure has handed us lemons! Each day I wake up and count which day this is of staying at home trying to stay healthy, so I don’t infect anyone else or overwhelm our healthcare system.

So, it’s time to make some lemonade. There are multiple ways to make lemonade. We can add sugar or a sugar substitute, or other flavors such as strawberry, raspberry or blueberry. We can add iced tea and/or even add some alcohol. No matter how we make our lemonade, it is still basically juice from a lemon.

And so, it is with the church, we are all Christians, although we have lots of variations. Not just in what we believe but also in how we “do” church. Prior to the last week for most of us church was done in person, in a building, and with other likeminded individuals. Now we are doing church through live streams, you tube and even going to a drive in. Yet we are still the body of Christ in the world. If I can dare say that there is a silver lining during this pandemic, then it is that we are worshipping and doing ministries in new ways. These are things we talked about, prayed about, and

wondered how we could reach new people to share God’s love with them. Now, more people than ever can join us in worship. People can be anywhere there is internet access. People in hospitals, nursing homes, private homes and even abroad can join us as the body of Christ in worship. We aren’t stuck in our buildings anymore. That’s amazing and remarkable!

Paul exhorts us in Romans to hold fast to what is good, love one another, and be there for each other. And we are finding new ways of doing just that. Phone calls are being made to make sure people are okay, Facebook is filled with posts checking in on each other and offering help if it is needed. Friends are texting each other to make sure we are all surviving. I am seeing more of my neighbors because we are all out walking to get some exercise and fresh air. We are certainly being God’s hands and feet in the world. What wonderful opportunities we have to genuinely care of each other.

Let us rejoice in that this pandemic allows us to persevere in prayer and extend hospitality to strangers. We may be frustrated by the loss of our freedom of movement, and it might be really challenging to remain shuttered at home, and yet prayer is a way for us to maintain some control, to help one another and to be reminded that God is with us every moment of every day.

So, we are making lemonade in new ways. And it really tastes fantastic! Steeped in God’s love, in care for each other, helping each person persevere and, in the end, I believe we will be stronger, more resilient, and more actively the body of Christ in the world.

In Peace,
Pastor Suzanne

REFLECTION FOR MONDAY MARCH 23, 2020

Isaiah 60:1-3

¹*Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*

²*For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;*

*but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.*

³*Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*

Greetings my friends!

“Where were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor?” “Where were you when you heard about the assassination of JFK?” “Where were you when you heard about 9/11?” These are questions often asked and easily answered by people who lived during these tragic moments in history. “Where were you when you first heard about the Coronavirus?”

Hmmm.... I honestly don't know. I do know that months before this pandemic truly “hit” home, a sister in Christ at our Saturday night worship shared with me great concern about the outbreak of this unexpected virus in China. I do know that in the span of the past three weeks, my eyes have witnessed precautions being taken at all levels of our government that in my life are unprecedented. I do know that in the last two weeks, “Church” as I knew it has been turned upside down. Leaders of the Church at every level are thoughtfully discerning and praying about how to best shepherd our people through this moment in history.

There is no magic “roadmap” to guide us through this specific moment in history. However, Biblical history itself can shed important “light” upon our path. The Israelites who were in bondage in Egypt for 400 years and then suddenly freed into the desert faced great uncertainty in their daily living. The early Christian Church worshipping communities as they were considered “enemies” of the state faced great

uncertainty in their daily living. The Church during the time of the Reformation, both internally and by external forces lived through a time of incredible uncertainty. The early churches established in the “New Land” lived through a time of great uncertainty. All these moments in history share something incredibly important for you and me to hold on to during these uncertain times. Throughout ALL time and ALL history, our Lord has walked with God's children through these moments of uncertainty and brought them through their own “time in the wilderness.”

God has NOT abandoned us! God WILL NOT abandon us! God WILL NEVER abandon God's own!

The decisions that we make now. The way we live out our daily lives and our shared lives together make an incredibly strong proclamation about our faith in God to our neighbors, to one another, and especially to our children. Indeed, my friends we are truly “living history!”

In five, ten, 15, or 20 years from now, what will our youngest believers recall about this unprecedented moment in time that we are now living through? Will they remember that this was a time when their family and their church family grew closer together even when we were forced into social distancing? Will our youngest believers recall that their community of faith continued to reach out to them, keeping them close together and sharing the Word of God with them? Will they fondly remember how this was a time in which they witnessed with their own eyes and unprecedented caring and concern for their neighbors?

A sister in Christ of mine recently wrote “I am, after all, a child of the 60s ... and grew up really believing that if we just reached enough people with the message of love and kindness and peace, we could honestly change the world.” Well my friend... I, and I know you

ARISE 
SHINE

too, still believe this to be true!

Trust God my friends, for God has never and will never abandon us! Love God my friends, for God is supremely worthy of our great love and affection! Love your neighbors my friends, for God desires that we share the love that we have received with those who gather around us. Love yourselves my friends, for the Lord has deemed you each worthy and desires that your life be filled with love in abundance!

Allow the unrelenting and passionate love of our God which pursues us all to literally “be the light” for those in need! Then, our children and their children will be able to look back on this time and recall this moment of history as a time in which God’s children who gathered around them truly lived a life in which God’s light could be seen in all that was accomplished!

For now;

Trust God, keep washing those hands,
and be at peace!

PJ

REFLECTION WEDNESDAY MARCH 25, 2020

Matthew 22:36-40

³⁶Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest? ³⁷He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”

³⁸This is the greatest and first commandment.

³⁹And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ⁴⁰On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

We are starting our second week of mostly staying at home. Today, as I delivered groceries to a member in need, I started to think about how much we take for granted every day. A simple trip to the grocery was exciting! A member shared with me how excited her teen age daughter was to drive with her to the post office! Two weeks ago, this would have seemed more a chore than a privilege.

The ability to go out to dinner or gather with friends. Or shop at a small business or mall. Just to be able to give a hug. The ability to go to the gym or golf. I suspect that most of us never gave any of these activities a second thought, they were just part of the fabric of our lives. And now, they are temporarily suspended.

Could you have imagined a month ago that we would see cancellations or postponements of every conceivable sporting event? It even appears that the Summer Olympics will get pushed back until next year. I am sure to vary-ing degrees we all miss these events. This is the first time in my adult life that I can remember professional athletes being irrelevant in our day to day life. So much for hero worship for professional athletes. And how many things related to Hollywood are also being postponed? Suddenly, celebrities are irrelevant in our daily lives too.

In their place we are finding that the real heroes are the people that do everyday jobs and vocations. Truck drivers, grocery store workers, utility workers, and mechanics are working alongside police officers, fire fighters, nurses and doctors, paramedics and all the support people that work with them behind the scenes. And let’s not forget all the volunteers that are working around the clock to help keep vital services going and checking in with people. I can’t help but think about Martin Luther when he commented about the importance of daily vocations. He said the purpose of vocation and good works is to love and serve our neighbors. For Luther even changing a diaper is a good and needed vocation.

I wonder, is a consequence of this time of physical separation a new centering for us? Can we now realign our values to place a higher emphasis on those who serve the greater good? Can we really appreciate the little things in life? Can the Christian Church be relevant once again in our society? Can we let God back

JESUS REPLIED:
LORD YOUR GOD
AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND,
YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL
YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL
YOUR MIND, THIS IS THE
GREATEST COMMANDMENT.
AND THE SECOND IS LIKE IT:
“LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR
AS YOURSELF.”
MATTHEW 22:37-39

in? So many questions and so many opportunities. May God bless us with the wisdom and energy to advance these values back into daily life.

In Peace,
Pastor Suzanne

YOUTH EDUCATION UPDATES

The Lenten Fair scheduled for March 29, 2020 on the LOC Campus has been cancelled. Breakfast with the Easter Bunny and Egg Hunt scheduled for April 11, 2020 on our LOC campus has also been cancelled. If we see a time when these events can be held, we will inform the congregations.

THE ESCAPADES OF HAIRY THE HARE (EASTER BUNNY, ESQ)

Taken from the UPG website, written by Josh

Gulotta: Our new youth series is an episodic adventure featuring the Easter Bunny's visit to the UPG! Input and ideas from the comments section will determine the future of Hairy's adventures! Make sure to add your thoughts in the comments.

CHAPTER ONE! The Hare Hairy

"Truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

- Matthew 18:19-20

Did you know the Easter Bunny is Lutheran?
It's true!

Way back when, over three hundred years ago, a community very much like ours decided they needed a new way to show Christ's love to their daughters and sons. That's when Georg (the local rabbit farmer) introduced the churchgoers to Hairy, his prized hare.

Hairy the hare was six feet tall from bunny ear to bunny foot. He was all white with a great big bunny

tail and long white bunny whiskers. "Everyone loves bunnies!" Georg explained. "And for as long as any of us can remember, bunnies have symbolized new life! Isn't that what Easter's about?"

The community all agreed on that.

"Best of all," Georg continued, "this hare wasn't raised by other hares... he was raised by chickens!"

The community gasped in awe. They had never heard of a bunny raised by chickens before. (And I'm guessing you haven't either!)

"Everyone knows chickens and eggs symbolize new life, too!" Handel (the local chicken farmer) exclaimed from the crowd.

SO! A new tradition was born.

Every year since then Hairy has traveled from church to church sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. And wouldn't you know it? This year Hairy chose to visit the UPG!

Bad news for us, though, huh? Hairy showed up at our Light of Christ campus last Sunday with his big basket of colored eggs! He walked straight through the front door (for everyone knows locks don't work on bunnies) and was expecting the church to be filled with new friends to make.

But no one was home!

Hairy hopped upstairs to the Sunday School. He thought the rooms would be filled with students singing and playing and reading scripture.

But there wasn't a single kid to be found!

Finally, Hairy heard a noise in another room, and he hopped along until he found Mrs. Terry (Yes, OUR Mrs. Terry!). Mrs. Terry was sadly packing away leftover snacks and crafts. When she saw Hairy a big smile grew on her face.

"Hairy, you've made it!" Mrs. Terry said with joy, but Hairy only looked about and raised his hands as if to say, "Well, where is everybody?"

Mrs. Terry, of course, speaks Bunneese (she was the one who arranged for Hairy to visit, after all!) and so she understood what he



meant immediately. "It's terrible news, Hairy," Mrs. Terry said, shaking her head. "We have to cancel Sunday School until further notice."

Hairy hopped so frantically his big ears almost hit the ceiling. Mrs. Terry rushed to explain, "there is a terrible virus that is making everyone ill, so all the children are helping the community by staying home. It's called 'social distancing'. Have you heard of it?"

Hairy tapped his foot and put a finger to his whiskers.

"No, I guess you haven't," Mrs. Terry said glumly. "It's new. Everyone is teaching each other about it on the internet."

Hairy held up his big furry paws.

"Yes, I know," Mrs. Terry assured the hare. "Bunnies can't use iPhones. Good thing I'm here to tell you the tips."

Mrs. Terry explained that the best way to keep everyone in our church community safe was to:

1. Stay home! So we don't spread germs. "This is a great time to spend with family," Mrs. Terry explained. "It's also a good time to read a book you've always wanted to read or watch a show you've always wanted to watch!"
2. Reach Out! So we don't feel alone. "Since we shouldn't see each other in person," Mrs. Terry explained, "it's important for everyone to keep in touch with their friends and family through texting and phone and video calls. Now's a perfect time to connect with your third cousin twice removed, or your penpal you've been meaning to write to!"
3. Be Nice! So our parents don't sell us to the zoo. "I know this is new to the children," Mrs. Terry explained, "but the truth is none of us have experienced anything like this. When we stay inside too long it's easy to become grumpy or pent up. Grumpiness spreads! But so does kindness. Thinking of how our actions affect others is very important right now. That's what this whole adventure is about!"

Hairy was glad for the lesson, but he was still feeling very down. He wouldn't be able to spend any time with the people of the UPG. He wanted to go to Sunday School and bible study and quilters club and pub theology and all the other

cool things the people of the UPG do every week. But now it looked like his plan was ruined.

Just when it seemed all hope was lost, Mrs. Terry let out a shout and started hopping up and down with so much excitement you'd almost think she was a bunny!

"But Hairy!" Mrs. Terry said, so excited she could barely get the words out, "I've had a wonderful idea! I just remembered... none of these rules should apply to you! You're a bunny!"

Hairy jumped in the air too! He didn't know exactly where Mrs. Terry was going, but he knew it was wise to always trust her (as I'm sure you know already!)

"You can visit with anyone you want!" Mrs. Terry explained. "You can check in with all the loved ones of our church, and keep them company, play games with them, pray with them, and spread the Good News!"

Hairy liked this idea very, very much. He was almost out the door before he realized he didn't know anyone in the congregation!

"I'll help you," Mrs. Terry said kindly. "I'll make a long list of all the people you'll have to meet in the UPG."

And that's exactly what she did!

Make sure to check back for the next chapter on Friday! (The next chapter will be based on the feedback Josh get's from the UPG Youth.)

CALENDAR UPDATES

Sunday April 26 "Music Among Friends" Concert is cancelled.

LOCAL FOOD SUPPORT

McCarthy's Red Stag Pub just off Main Street in Bethlehem is currently providing free soup to anyone who might be in need of food right now (from 12 PM - 7 PM each day). If you know anyone without food or families that need, please call the pub at (610) 861-7631 and we'll put down your name on your bag to pick up in front of our red door!

SUNDAY WORSHIP

Sunday Worship is live streamed through the UPG Facebook page on Sunday mornings. You can also view a recorded version on YouTube at your convenience.