



2021

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Mini-Newsletter + March 7, 2021 + 3rd Sunday in Lent

Dear Friends,

How very, very odd! This coming Saturday night into Sunday, March 13-14, it is time to change our clocks for Daylight Savings Time – and that is odd because this will be the first time EVER (almost) I have not needed to remind all of you that you will be late for church if you forget to change your own clocks. One Palm Sunday, we watched through the chapel windows as not one or two but FIVE families parked way down the street and walked to the front to come into the chapel. We were just finishing the service. One year I had to call the Lay Eucharistic Minister as we neared 10 am and ask where she was and another year it was ... Well, let's just say it hasn't been me, yet.

But this year, you won't be late – you can watch our video service any time, or catch another meditation or service on line. Or you can go for a walk and listen to the birds or take your dog with you. Or you can meditate on the return of sunlight by going to buy seeds. But you won't be late for our services – because next week, March 15th, is the anniversary of leaving the chapel and having no clue at all that we would not be back for over a year. We had no idea there would soon be a toilet paper shortage, restaurants would close, many movie theaters would be permanently shuttered. Teachers did not know how to teach on line, most of us thought "Zoom" was an old Mazda commercial, and introverts who seek alone time had no idea there could be too much of such a good thing. Nor did we have any real idea how very many loved ones would be stuck in quarantine, how many would die, how many would struggle for months with lasting symptoms that may see no end. And now we feel stupid halfway from our cars to the store when we remember our masks, and we – most of us, anyway – are happier than we have ever been to schedule vaccination times.

The hymn, "O God, our help, in ages past" calls time an "ever-rolling stream." Well, yes, but the stream seems to have dropped us over quite a waterfall a year ago. This weekend we will change the time, as easily as good musicians change their meter. As the light grows, we hope, and we pray that Lent will turn to Easter, and the season of pandemic will finally turn toward a steadier stream in the transformed waters of our lives. There will always be darkness, but daytime is growing and growing now. The waterfall has dropped us, suddenly, but its thundering is starting to quiet and new life is ahead.

Peace be with you – now, and always.



→ Please note that the Bishop's Committee meets Friday March 26th at 7:00 pm via Zoom

→ Palm Sunday is March 28th and Holy Week follows – please watch your email and Facebook spaces for links to our mini services and other times of prayer.

→ Easter Day is April 4th! Hallelujah! We will be offering Easter Prayers and Songs in the Park on Saturday afternoon April 3rd, joining with other Merrimack Faith Communities for Easter sunrise on Easter Day, and releasing a special recorded Easter mini service.

PRAYER LIST – Please send updates to the prayer list or prayers you find helpful!

In Our Prayers: Please remember all who are coping with severe weather, particularly in our southern states. Pray for all who are injured, ill or infirm, including those dealing with COVID-19, and for Jane Howard, Greg (Dawn MacKechnie's friend), Adrian Pike, Beatrice Wright, Karen Brown, Karenina Armstrong, Rhonda, Santos Lara Sr., Kirsten Draba, Julia DiStefano, Denys Ruel, Marjorie Johnston, Steven Lassey, Elvira Lassey, Larry Carpenter, Alfred Panela, Jim & Margo Barbotsina, Rick Fiacco, Daniel Parada, Mark May, Stephanie Holdgate, Nancy and Mike Colombo, Valerie Neill, Bill Lambrokous, Margaret Makowski Saunders, Mark Carter & Family, Anne & Paul Makowski, Steve Blotcky and Rachel Osborne. We pray for: those who seek well-being for others, including Merrimack's emergency personnel; all medical workers; and all "essential workers." We also remember Bishop Hirschfeld and the Episcopal Church in NH; our Prison Ministries; the St. Petersburg Men's Ensemble; the Turkish Cultural Center; 4 Directions Outreach; our Food Pantries; Wheeler Memorial Chapel Trustees; our AA groups; Congregation Betenu, Qodesh Family Church & all of Merrimack's Faith Communities.

A Prayer During Pandemic by The Most Rev. Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

God of compassion, be close to those who are ill, afraid or in isolation. In their loneliness, be their consolation; in their anxiety, be their hope; in their darkness, be their light; through him who suffered alone on the cross, but reigns with you in glory, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Take a look – Here are the lessons for the 3rd Sunday in Lent.

The Collect

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Exodus 20:1-17

Then God spoke all these words: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.

- You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and

the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

- You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.
- Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. For six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.
- Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.
- You shall not murder.
- You shall not commit adultery.
- You shall not steal.
- You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Psalm 19

¹ The heavens declare the glory of God, *and the firmament shows his handiwork.

² One day tells its tale to another, *and one night imparts knowledge to another.

³ Although they have no words or language, *and their voices are not heard,

⁴ Their sound has gone out into all lands, *and their message to the ends of the world.

⁵ In the deep has he set a pavilion for the sun; *it comes forth like a bridegroom from his chamber; it rejoices like a champion to run its course.

⁶ It goes forth from the uttermost edge of the heavens and runs about to the end of it; *nothing is hidden from its burning heat.

⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect and revives the soul; *the testimony of the LORD is sure and gives wisdom to the innocent.

⁸ The statutes of the LORD are just and rejoice the heart; *the commandment of the LORD is clear and gives light to the eyes.

⁹ The fear of the LORD is clean and endures for ever; *the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, more than much fine gold, *sweeter far than honey, than honey in the comb.

¹¹ By them also is your servant enlightened, *and in keeping them there is great reward.

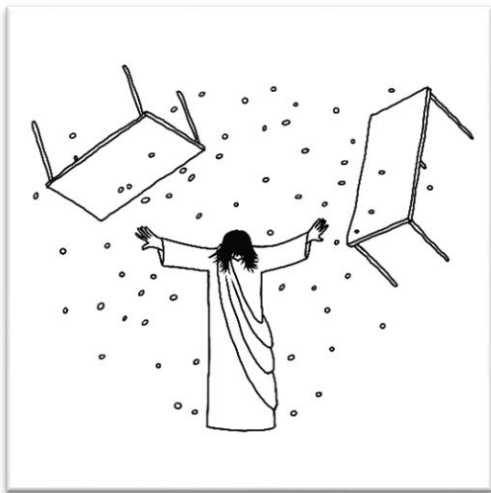
¹² Who can tell how often he offends? *cleans me from my secret faults.

¹³ Keep your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not get dominion over me; *then shall I be whole and sound, and innocent of a great offense.

¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, *O LORD, my strength and my redeemer.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.



John 2:13-22

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three

days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

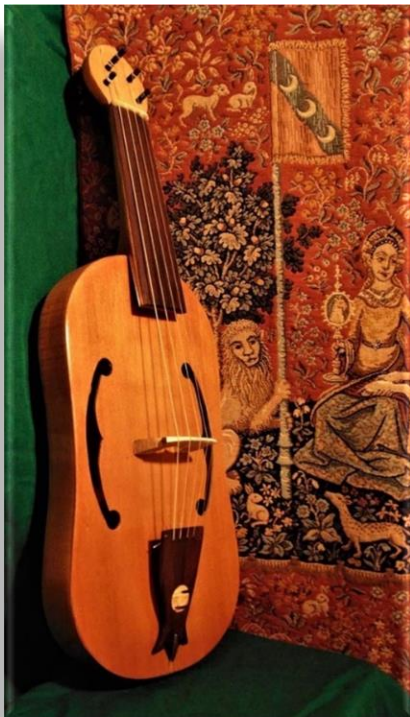
As you Consider the Readings, Especially, Take a Look at –

- The Israelites had been set free by God through Moses' leadership: What does it mean that the same God who sets His people free also sets the 10 Commandments upon them? How are freedom and laws related? How are liberty and covenants connected?
- Next, in Psalm 19, how does the law of God follow from God's **glory**? Verse 8 says, "The statutes of the LORD are just and rejoice the heart; the commandment of the LORD is clear and gives light to the eyes." What do you think glory is? Do you think the commandment of God brings light to your eyes?
- In the Epistle, how are foolishness and wisdom seen? How do foolishness and wisdom meet in Christ?
- Why is Jesus so upset in this Gospel story?

Consider – Maybe liberty and law are both gifts of God. Maybe the foolishness and wisdom of the cross of Christ are also gifts. Apparent opposites may be like the strings on instruments that must be fastened down at both ends and tuned – both to pitch, and to other instruments. These things and many more are living and true – true in the same sense as music being made.



Hence from our **Hymnal 1982**, #625, *Ye holy angels bright*, we have the last verse –



**“My soul, bear thou thy part,
Triumph in God above:
And with a well-tuned heart
Sing thou the songs of love!
Let all thy days
Till life shall end,
Whate'er he send,
Be filled with praise!”**



Please pray about these questions, and let Vicar Pat know any thoughts you have in response – Karl Vaters is a deep believer in small congregations, and he writes this blog to support us all.

“Will The Congregation Come Back?” Should Not Be Our Biggest Concern (6 Better Questions) By Karl Vaters / February 26, 2021

It’s the question on every pastor’s heart and mind right now. We understand why people haven’t been coming to church through the pandemic. Especially for those whose church buildings haven’t reopened yet, of course.

- But once it’s over will they ever come back?
- No one knows for sure.
- But I’m not worried. At all.
- First, because the church of Jesus has survived bigger crises than this one.
- Second, because “will the congregation come back to church?” should not be the question that keeps us awake at night.
- There are so many better questions we need to ask. Questions that will get us thinking more clearly and biblically about what to do next.

Here are a few of them:

1. “Have we represented Jesus well during the lockdown?”

If the answer to this question is “maybe not”, that will also give us a big hint about why some people might not be coming back. Plus, those of us in the church are not the best ones to judge how well we’ve done this. We need to ask others. And we need to take their answers seriously – especially if it isn’t what we want to hear. We’ve been given a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to show who we really are over the past year or so. If we haven’t responded as well as we should, we need to fix that. No matter how well we’ve done this (or think we’ve done it), we can always be better representatives of Jesus.

2. “Are we representing Jesus well as we come out of the lockdown?”

As restrictions start lifting, we’ll need to make a lot of choices about issues we’ve never even *considered* before. From physical safety, to emotional challenges, to disagreements about those decisions. The goal should never be to get more people in the building, or even to move ahead without causing conflict. It must always be “are we representing Jesus well as we move forward?”

3. “What have we learned – and what are we still learning?”

If all we do at the end of this is try to get back to “normal”, we will not just have missed an opportunity to learn, we will have failed Jesus. Yes, that’s strong language. But I believe it to be true. Going through this and not learning from it is like the third servant in Jesus’ Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). After refusing to invest what he received, the master treated him with some of the harshest words and actions in the entire Bible. There’s a lot to learn through this. Those lessons are like great treasure. Don’t bury them, invest them in kingdom work.

4. “How can we better serve the people at home?”

Many of the folks who won’t come back to the physical building have all kinds of reasons for it. From being at-risk physically to not being ready emotionally, and more. Don’t criticize people who aren’t ready to come back to church yet. Reach out to them. Lovingly, kindly and compassionately. Blessing people where *they* are is more important than getting them to show up where *we* are.

5. “How well are we serving our online church members and visitors?”

We are in a new era of church attendance and involvement. People have come to know Jesus through our online services who have never been in our building. And many never will. Some because they live too far away, some due to ongoing physical risks, others who have trauma from church history, and more. If people have chosen to participate in your online services, thank them for it and figure out how to serve them well.

- Have an online pastor available during the live stream (if you don’t have multiple staff members, train a trusted church volunteer to answer basic questions and redirect online guests to more info)
- Acknowledge them from the pulpit
- Place the camera in a spot that feels inviting
- Guide them to further online help and activities

Online church is new territory, even for churches that have been doing it for a few years. We’re all learning how to do it better. The most important aspect of online church isn’t how to make the tech better, it’s how to make it personal.

6. “How are people hurting, and what can we do to help them?”

People’s problems will not be over when the pandemic ends. Instead, we will be heading into years of crisis and recovery that are likely to see record numbers of Divorces, Bankruptcies, Evictions, Homelessness, Mental breakdowns, Joblessness, Church closures, Pastoral resignations and other issues we can’t foresee. More than ever, the communities around us are going to need the help of healthy, missional, compassionate, worshiping, and loving churches. Whether people come back through our church doors is not the big issue. How we honor Jesus by reaching the hurting people outside our doors is what matters.

Ministry needs to happen *from* the church, not just *in* the church.