

**Wednesday April 8, 2020**

**Rev. Nancy's Mid-week Reflection During the Pandemic**

Blessed Hump Day!

Well, here we are again, entering into a 4<sup>th</sup> week of self-isolation and physical/social distancing. I don't know what it's like for you, but, for me, the days are blurring together. It's hard to mark time. Every day feels like the last one. The days all seem to be the same. I wonder if this is what it feels like to be in solitary confinement. But, from what the experts say, the social sacrifices we're making is working to keep the contagion and deaths down.

We're also entering into Holy Week. Lent is coming to an end and our journey with God ramps up. The Passion is at hand. Lent came and went in the middle of a pandemic. Like someone said, "This is the Lentiest Lent we've ever Lented." Amen to that!

Although we're entering into Holy Week, it sure doesn't feel like it. I was talking to a clergy person yesterday in one of my many zoom meetings. Holy Week is known as a busy time for clergy, the busiest time, in fact. It's still busy in the midst of a pandemic, but in a different way. When we're all supposed to gear up for the many traditional church services ahead of us, we're attending zoom meetings. She lamented this new reality. Rather than leading God's people into a time of worship in buildings and into the Via Delorosa ("The Way of Suffering" – Via Delorosa is a processional route in the Old City of Jerusalem, believed to be the path that Jesus walked on the way to his crucifixion), we're having zoom meetings and virtual on-line services. It's all a bit weird. I'm sure this is true for Pope Francis this Easter Sunday, standing all alone, on the massive steps of St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, speaking to millions of the faithful without seeing the faithful. Holy Week just doesn't feel like Holy Week for God's people. It's truly a time to lament.

In today's Daily Office Lectionary, the assigned first reading is Lamentations 2:1-9. Verse 6 says, *He [God] has destroyed His place of assembly; The Lord has caused The appointed feasts and Sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion.* How appropriate this verse shows up in the lectionary at this time. We lament we cannot enter into Holy Week the way we like. Many are missing the Eucharist. And we see in today's reading that all this is God's doing. How is that, you say? God is causing everything we are seeing and experiencing right now? Is God the cause of this pandemic? More on this later in the rabbi's video, which I talk about at the end of this reflection.

From a human and social perspective, we are missing the usual, comfortable rituals - the church services, travelling, family gatherings, Easter Break. It's hard to take a break when you're not working outside the home. Stay-at-home moms know this all too well. Every moment is work time, unless you make strict boundaries, something I am learning and working hard at creating. At a time of self-isolation, we need to

take breaks from our breaks! I think one of the clergy said that their kitchen is now the break room. So, things are really out of whack.

But, from a spiritual vantage point, there maybe is an upside to all of this. Holy Week is a time we remember Jesus' passion and suffering. We usually celebrate Holy Week symbolically. We attend the services. We hear the Passion Story. We venerate the cross. We sing hymns that we only sing once a year. We celebrate the Triduum, the church's three most holy days of the liturgical year – Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Vigil. These symbolic rituals, rites, songs and liturgies are comforting, beautiful and glorifies God. And we miss them.

But, because of the time we're in, we are actually **living** Holy Week, not symbolically but in reality. And maybe that's a good thing. If we're keeping faith, we are suffering just as Jesus suffered. Some of us are dying as well and will die, like Jesus on the cross. For some of us, especially the front-line nurses, doctors, police officers, fire-fighters, grocery clerks and long-term caregivers, the ones we say work in essential services, for these people, it feels like Good Friday, every day. In this pandemic, God is bringing us closer to Jesus' Passion than ever before. And if we're given the grace, this actual suffering will bear much spiritual fruit in our lives. Rather than celebrate Holy Week ritualistically, we're being called to celebrate Holy Week existentially, experientially and realistically. This is a gift, truly, when the Via Dolorosa comes to our doorsteps.

On Maundy Thursday, the night when we remember the Last Supper, we are now experiencing what it means to serve one another and to heed Jesus' new commandment for his disciples, "Love one another." Are we not serving God and others by social distancing and self-isolation? Isn't this our sacrifice? Yes, we're afraid. That's one reason why we're following these new coronavirus protocols. But, we're also doing so out of love. We don't want to spread this highly infectious disease to others. That's why we wear masks. Not to protect ourselves from this dreaded disease, but to protect others. We want to "flatten the curve", so our medical professionals and facilities won't be overwhelmed. We're taking care of one another through the phone trees our vestries have started. We're encouraging our people to reach out to one another, difficult as it may be. Families are coming together to help their elderly parents with groceries and errands.

I know in our family, we're learning Jesus' Maundy Thursday teachings in a new way. Tim has had to hand in his resignation at work today. He didn't want to. But, when he was called back to work after two weeks off, we had to wrestle with the fact that his 87-year old mother lives with us. We concluded we couldn't risk bringing any infection home. We might have felt differently, if it was just him and me at home. But, that's not the case. We are grateful we had the freedom to choose. Some don't. They have to work and I'm sure it's causing a lot of stress in their lives.

You were all sent an email with a schedule to sign up for a prayer vigil. I encourage you to sign up if you haven't done so. If there are no slots left, pray anyways.

Imagine if all of us took time to pray on our own in celebration of the Easter Vigil. God would still hear our prayers, even if we're not together in the same building. There are bible verses and prayers attached in the email to help us keep vigil. We're called to keep watch over God's creation at this time through prayer. A vigil is a time of waiting. Let's not be like the early disciples who couldn't keep vigil with Jesus as he struggled with his pending death in the Garden of Gethsemane. Let us pray unceasingly as we wait for the time God will release us from the horrors of this virus.

Tonight at sundown, our Jewish brothers and sisters begin their celebration of Passover. This celebration lasts from evening April 8 to evening April 16. Tonight, they remember the time that God passed-over the Jewish people, a time when God's people were spared from suffering and death (Exodus 11). Usually the Jewish people celebrate tonight with a seder supper. Like Christians this Easter, it will be a challenge to celebrate something that you usually do with friends and family while in isolation.

In honour of our Jewish heritage, I share with you a video from Rabbi Manis Friedman, a Jewish Chassidic rabbi in Canada. I share this video for a few reasons. **First**, the rabbi has some thoughtful, theological reflections on faith, God and what's happening now with the pandemic. It's always good to hear a wise person of faith speak at a time like this. **Second**, Jesus was a rabbi. So, I think it's appropriate for Christians to hear from a rabbi every so often. **Third**, since the early days of Christianity, the Church, for some odd reason, has forgotten, rejected and eschewed her Jewish roots. I feel this is to the Church's detriment and deficiency. Since the early Church, Greek philosophy and the Hellenistic worldview has greatly influenced the way the Church understands Jesus, his teachings and human life in general. This is both for good and for ill. **Fourth**, as a direct result of point #3, anti-semitism has been a stronghold in the hearts and minds of Christians throughout the centuries. Anti-semitism is a scourge on the history of the Christian faith and is something the Church needs to repent of. Maybe listening to a Jewish rabbi will help ameliorate any traces of anti-semitism in our hearts.

The rabbi is easy to listen to. But, he sometimes throws in a few Hebrew words. I'll list them below and their translation. I hope it will help you understand what he means.

The video is 51:30 minutes in length. But, don't let that deter you. Get your favourite mug and tea and a comfy throw, sit at Jesus' feet, and listen to the rabbi's wisdom.

*A Meaningful Life in Quarantine by Rabbi Manis Friedman*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ypqd401MV7w&t=451s>

I've put the times of the video where the Hebrew words are spoken. Not sure if I got them all, but here it is in its imperfection!

- 00:26 The Baal Shem Tov is a Jewish mystic and healer, who is regarded as the founder of Hasidic Judaism. Nothing moves unless there is a purpose that moves it. Does God **allow** things to happen or does God **make** things happen?
- 5:38 *Midrash* – an ancient commentary on the Hebrew scriptures, e.g., story of the Golden Calf
- 5:42 *Moshe* – Moses
- 8:42 *Pesach* – Passover
- 9:20 *Chametz* – foods with leavening agents forbidden on Passover.
- 10:30 *Mishnah* – the first major written collection of the Jewish oral traditions
- 16:24 *Masiach* – “Messiah” in Jewish eschatology (“the future”, “end times”).
- 16:34 King Solomon – For everything there is a season.
- 19:00 *Purim* – One of the most fun Jewish feasts but is often under recognized. Held on the 14th day of the Hebrew month of Adar — usually March or April; commemorates the day Esther, Queen of Persia, saved the Jewish people from execution by Haman, the advisor to the Persian king.
- 19:18 *Mazel* – “fortune”, “luck”
- 20:56 There’s a glitch in the video. The screen goes blank and the rabbi becomes a chipmunk. Don’t worry. It only lasts for a few seconds until 21:04.
- 31:40 *Mitzvah* – commandments; good deeds
- 40:32 Rabbi’s final thought
- 42:35 *Tefillin* – set of small black leather boxes containing scrolls of parchment inscribed with verses from the Torah.
- 42:41 *Matzoh* -- unleavened flatbread that forms an integral element of the Passover Feast

**For your further enjoyment and edification:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67e6P8uAUG0&t=2616s>

The most popular HYMNS for LENT and PASSIONTIDE by Richard McVeigh and Beauty in Sound. The choir sings wonderfully and it’s a beautiful playlist and a lovely setting!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdcS0Nbo7Ng>

One U.K. family's lockdown adaptation of Les Misérables song goes viral