

Mid-week Reflection #6
May 6, 2020
By The Rev. Nancy Yee

Greetings in the name of the One who went about his Father's business

How are you? Now, if you say "fine", I will ask which "fine" do you mean. The small letter "fine" that we usually answer when asked, "How are you"? Or, the Aerosmith F.I.N.E.?

You know what F.I.N.E. stands for, right? **F**reaked out, **I**nsecure, **N**eurotic and **E**motional. Now, if you know the rock band, Aerosmith, their "F", in their song, "F.I.N.E.", doesn't stand for "Freaked out." It stands for the other F-word, which given my vocation, I won't say or even type in public.

I think with this pandemic going into its 7th week, with no end in sight, my usual "fine" isn't "fine". Even though it's spring, gardening is around the corner, the days are getting longer, things feel a bit lighter and governments are talking about easing restrictions, I'm still only F.I.N.E., if you know what I mean. This new normal still doesn't feel that "normal".

After all, we've been forced into hiding with this pandemic. That's never a good thing. Forced into hiding reminds me of war, persecution and violence. Being forced into hiding takes away our freedoms and our sense of security. Being forced into hiding from an invisible microscopic enemy makes me feel helpless and powerless. Every day, our world gets smaller and smaller, as our homes become our hiding places from a scary world attacked by a scary virus. F.I.N.E. is as good as it gets, right now, don't you think??

But, the thing is, I'm getting kind of used to this "forced hiddenness", this self-imposed exile. I think we're all finding a new emotional rhythm. I know I am. We may be getting used to this feeling of staying at home and not heading out to the stores to buy things we don't need because we're bored. Or, we may no longer feel a real urge to eat out at our favourite restaurant. We're going to make more calculated risks as to what's essential and what's not. This new learned behaviour won't be good for a capitalistic, consumer-based economic system. I hope we won't go back to the old ways of making money and spending it. But, we'll need a new economic system where people can have meaningful work, earn a reasonable living and not have it be based on greed and fear.

I think it feels more “normal” these days to physically distance when you go out to get groceries. I think the idea of physical distancing has seeped into our collective unconsciousness of acceptance and tolerance.

For example, I have found if you get too close to people, all of a sudden, they politely step back. Or they stop mid-step, letting you go first. Or, they turn their faces and bodies away from you as they squeeze along empty shelves, to let you pass, if you happen to be in the same grocery store aisle. We’re all getting used to seeing masks on people, plexiglass shields separating us from the cashier, security guards at store entrances, arrows on the aisle. Those arrows are so ubiquitous that I feel a bit irritated and insecure when I don’t see them in a store.

This normalization of forced hiddenness can be both good and bad. Good because finding a routine and normalization in self-isolation and physical distancing keeps us sane and safe. But, it’s really tiring to remember to behave differently in public. I don’t know how things will play out when restrictions lift a bit and summer rolls around. People now are opening their cabins and signing up for campground spaces. Golf courses are getting ready. What will it feel like to go to familiar places of rest and relaxation in God’s playground in the middle of a pandemic? Will summer feel the same like it did last year? Or, will it feel awkward, like you’ve been hit with a bad case of agoraphobia (deep fear of open spaces) after coming out of forced hiding?

I found myself getting groceries the other day and forgetting my pandemic manners. The nicer weather can be distracting. Looking at the blue sky, smelling the fresh air, listening to the birds sing, seeing all the shorts and pale, untanned legs. With these distractions, I moved a bit too close to a woman in the line-up. She was kind. She smiled. But, she had that frightened animal “deer caught in the headlights” look in her eyes. What have we been made into, I wonder, with this disease? How will we come out of this together with our sense of wellness intact?

I think there will be lots of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorders) for humanity after the pandemic. But, it doesn’t have to be that way. Not if we learn during this time of forced hiddenness to heed what God wants to teach us. I think if we take this time to find spiritual rest, if we take this time to be still and know God, not giving into our fears and anxieties, then our post COVID-19 time, whenever that will be, can be an amazing time of renewal. I was told by a modern-day prophet, that if we don’t take this time to rest, we will be sick, sicker than ever, in our post-covid days.

Being forced into hiding isn’t a good thing. But, if we spend this time hiding with God, there will be spiritual fruit in our lives.

As I was reflecting on pandemic hiddenness, what it might mean for us, I was reminded of all types of hiddenness in scripture and in life. I don't have an in-depth theological analysis for you. I could. There's nothing more I enjoy better than having a deep theological discussion. But, this isn't the time or the place.

What I like to do is give you a brief overview of some of the things that came to my mind this week in preparing for this reflection. These brief reflections don't capture all the facets and nuances of divine and human hiddenness. They may not be as coherent as I'd like or thought through well. But, at least, they will give you some food for thought in your time of hiddenness.

CORRIE TEN BOOM: HIDING IN WWII



“Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.”

There's a cost to hiddenness. But, there's a reward as well. Corrie ten Boom and her family hid many Jews during WWII and helped them escape the Nazis.

Corrie ten Boom: A Tramp for God (Length - 44:12)

This video is a powerful re-enactment of the amazing account of God's plan for Corrie's life. <https://youtu.be/XnOuXNsoqRA>

PROPHETS AND KINGS HIDE IN CAVES

David, Israel's greatest king and Elijah, Israel's greatest prophet found themselves in caves, running for their lives and fighting off incredible discouragement, depression and disillusionment in their own journey of faith. The good news is, neither of the men stayed in the cave.

For Elijah, he heard the Lord in the still small voice. (1 Kings 19:11-13) The voice of the Lord wasn't in the wind, the fire or the earthquake. The voice of the Lord was in the stillness, not the spectacular. In forced hiddenness, we're called to find God in the stillness. This is hard to do, because we're overwhelmed by feelings of boredom, frustration, loneliness, anxiety and fear.

But, if you spend time in prayer with God, training your body, heart and mind to be still, and you persevere in prayer, you will find the spiritual strength to overcome

that which robs you of the peace and joy found in Christ Jesus. We all want some peace and joy these days. But, these spiritual fruit won't come easy. You'll have to fight your way through your negative emotions to allow the spiritual fruit to grow. That will be hard because we're not used to sitting with our negative emotions for any length of time. We usually stuff our fears/anxieties/worries down and ignore or repress them. We're usually so busy, we have no time to deal with our feelings.

But, in the hiddenness of our lives these days, our dark emotions easily come to the surface and feel very strong. So, it will take a lot of grace and soul work to experience the peace of Christ in the midst of a pandemic.

But, not to worry. Christ is with you by the Holy Spirit. He desires nothing more than to give you all you need to overcome this time of COVID-19 hiddenness. But, in order for spiritual fruit, like peace, joy, patience, perseverance to grow in your soul, you'll have to cultivate the soil of your heart and let the Holy Spirit plant seeds of love in there through prayer.

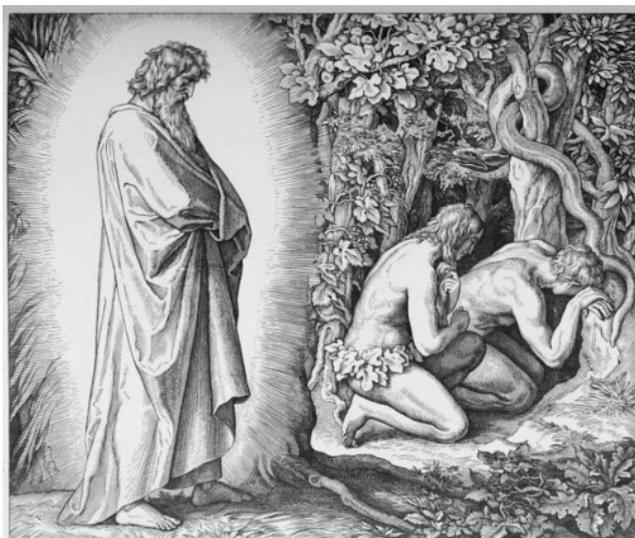
Read and pray 1 Corinthians 13 every day until the lockdown lifts. The Lord will change your heart without you evening doing anything except pray and read this verse. Soon, you'll become this amazing person of God. Jesus loves you and wants nothing more than for you to give him your troubles, burdens and worldly cares to find God, who is Peace and Love, at the center of your souls.

For David, he lifted his soul in worship and it was worship that lifted David out of the soul torment he was struggling through. David wrote both Psalm 57 and Psalm 142 while in the cave. I've attached these two psalms to this email. Please read them in the light of your forced hiddenness and this pandemic. Psalm 142 resonates, doesn't it?

So, isn't it good to know, that as people of faith at this time in 2020, humanity has something in common with King David, who lived thousands of years ago. He had a feeling of being trapped and needing God's help, not just to be free of the cave prison, but to be free to worship and love God. Read Psalm 142 over and over again and let the cries of your heart rise to the heavens to worship God in spirit and in truth. You will be blessed.

ADAM AND EVE HIDE FROM GOD IN THE GARDEN
(GENESIS 3.8)

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.



Do you remember why Adam and Eve hid from God? Because they felt naked and ashamed after they disobeyed God. In their sin, they forgot God's love for them. So, they hid. They felt their vulnerabilities, their nakedness, their guilt, their fear. But, hiding from God is not a good option. When we've done or feel our worse, that's when God wants to be most compassionate and present to us. Run towards God, not away from God, when you sin. God is slow to anger and easily forgives.

WE CAN'T HIDE FROM GOD

[Psalm 139](#) – One of my favourite psalms is Ps 139. God searches for us when we try to hide from God. We can't escape God's judgment, love and mercy.

*7 Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
10 even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
12 even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.*

Romans 8.38 (written by St. Paul)

38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

WE HIDE FROM OURSELVES

Sometimes we hide ourselves from others for fear of judgment. We put on psychological and emotional masks and present our false selves to the world, thinking we'll get the love, affirmation and justice we need. Some of us want to hide our issues, our concerns, the things we wrestle with in the dark, our demons. We hide because we've been taught that being vulnerable is weak.

But, there's a toll, also, when we hide from ourselves. We never learn to be self-aware so we can make the changes we need to make in our lives so we can be blessed and be a blessing to others. There's a toll when we hide from others. When we wear our masks (psychologically, speaking), it distances us from those we love and want a relationship with. When we pretend everything is ok, when it's not, we never learn to trust others and learn intimacy.

When we hide, whether we hide from self, others or God, we forget who we are and who we belong to.

HAGAR, ISHMAEL AND THE GOD WHO SEES

Genesis 21.8-21

Hagar was in desperate straights. Outcast and lost, she wondered where was her God. This sermon, "Lessons on Freedom from a Slave Named Hagar," by Jacqui Lewis, an African American preacher, is about Hagar and Ishamel and the God who sees. God sees us, even when God is hidden from our sight.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13f5tjhOfH8>

HIDDENNESS OF GOD

This is a BIG topic, the divine hiddenness of God. The philosopher, J.L. Schellenberg, in his landmark book, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (1993), proposed that God's divine hiddenness is evidence for atheism. For the longest time, the problem of evil was the major obstacle to belief. If there is a loving God, why is there evil in the world?

With Schellenberg's philosophical propositions, divine hiddenness became the second obstacle to belief. Throughout history, there have been many people who want to believe. Yet, God remains hidden, absent, and silent.

Divine hiddenness is a deep and complex theological problem. There are many videos on divine hiddenness. Some good. Some not so good. I present you with a couple of videos to get you started reflecting on divine hiddenness.

When God Seems Hidden | Live the Word #27 (Length – 15:02)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uzklv4ruzkQ>

The Problem of Divine Hiddenness w/ Dr. Micah Green (Length – 1:16:22)

This video has some audio issues in the beginning. It gets better at 13:39.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7sfuraGWGc>

Remember. Theological reflection is hard work. If you get confused, bored or irritated at the mental gymnastics, don't give up. You may want to re-watch the videos and start training your mind to think theologically. Doing theology well is a good remedy for dementia!

COVID-19 AND NATURE'S REVERSAL OF FORTUNE

Animals hide in their natural homes when humans are out and about. Now that we're hiding, the animals come out and are free to roam territory once belonging to humans. Ironic. We went into their habitats as they hid from us, protecting themselves. Now they're entering our man-made space, as we hide from the outside world to protect ourselves and loved ones. Wonder what all this means?

It may mean God wants to teach us how to care for creation by showing us a reversal of fortune for nature. The key to the Gospel of Luke is the theme of **reversal of fortune**, especially in the context of the rich and poor.

God's Great Reversal in Luke is reflected in

1. the Magnificat (Mary's Song) "He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty." (1:51-53);

2. in Luke's Beatitudes of Blessings and Woes (6:20-49)

Blessed are you who are poor, for the Kingdom of God is yours.

Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh.

3. Lazarus and the Rich Man (16:19-31)

Someday, God will make things right in nature, as well as with all humanity. God gives us a foretaste of this reversal as we see what's happening to nature as humanity hides in their homes in these videos.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zWUVS51N2Eg>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_gxZ9H5Q_Rk

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1qTDtjTrcl>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jv0DLTVfwIc>

These videos, especially the one on climate change, tell us that it's possible to have cleaner air and water. We can do it. We can live differently. We just need to rethink how we can live as a global community without having a pandemic force us to change behaviours we know needs to change. Lord, have mercy! Give us your divine wisdom, knowledge, and discernment to help creation sustain life for future generations.

OUR LIVES ARE HIDDEN IN CHRIST

Colossians 3.1-4

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

HIDDEN: A LIFE ALL FOR GOD

The Trappistine Sisters at Mount Saint Mary's Abbey in Wrentham, MA lead simple consecrated lives of prayer as lived in the heart of the Church for all their brothers and sisters in the world. This documentary offers a glimpse of their daily lives.

What can we learn from this beautiful documentary? Can we live the contemplative life without being a nun, a recluse or a monk? Can we learn anything from the sisters that we can apply to our lives in the outside world so we can find spiritual healing, strength, wholeness and the love of God for us?

I hope we can. I hope our love for God is as deep as the sisters. And if it's not, I hope God gives us the grace to cultivate this kind of love for God and others. This kind of love in the documentary is the essence of Jesus' teachings and life for us. I was moved to tears many times listening to the sisters' testimonies and their love for Jesus. May we all have their kind of hearts for Jesus!

This documentary is about an hour long.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ntt98rTky-g>

JESUS AND THE PRAYER CLOSET

Jesus said go into your prayer closet. Hide from the world in order to serve and love the world. Not in a carnal way. But, in a way that honours and glorifies God.

Sometimes we love the world for ourselves. Sometimes we love the world for what it can do for us. The world's resources are there for the taking. We dominate and exploit God's creation to give us riches, comfort, security and a good time. We use and manipulate people for our own needs.

But, Jesus says, love the world from a heart open to the Holy Spirit.

We are to hide in our prayer closet every day, to spend time alone with God, to pray and seek God's presence and face, even when God remains hidden from us. To persistently pray to a hidden God on a daily basis is the hallmark of sainthood and deep faith.

I hope you can, in this time of forced hiddenness from the world, learn to pray to a hidden God. You never know. God might lift the veil of hiddenness from you one day, a veil that's been there all your life and reveal God's true presence and love for you. Wouldn't it be amazing if you sought God while you're self-isolating and emerged into the world when all this is over with a new countenance, like Moses? What a great witness and testament you would have to give to others, that God met you in the hiddenness of life during lockdown.

Spending time with a hidden God won't be easy. You will need grace to do it. Ask the Lord Jesus for grace to go into your prayer closet every day. It will be worth it.

MUSIC AND POETRY

To help you in your contemplation of being hidden from the world this week: I share a couple of music videos and a poem by Charles Bukowski

1. The song in this video is sung by Kiesza, a Canadian artist. *Storm* is a global music video collaboration between Kiesza and the team at Winters Rock Entertainment, who gathered drone footage from over 100 cinematographers around the world to create an international image of the COVID-19 lockdown.

The song's lyrics are in the video's description section.

<https://youtu.be/GPagFPtCusQ>

2. Even if you sense and feel God’s hiddenness from you, **here’s a video reminding you that our God is a God who sees.** The video is made by Kathie Lee Gifford. Yes, that one, the one who hung out with Regis Philbin all those years on their own morning variety tv show, *Live! With Regis and Kathie Lee*.

This song is a modern oratorio telling the stories of Hagar, Ruth, David, and Mary and the promises God made to them. Even when we can’t see our God, God sees us.
<https://youtu.be/sz81dlfwf4Y>

3. **Charles Bukowski**, 1920-1994, a German-American poet, novelist and short-story writer. He reads his famous poem, *The Laughing Heart*. Isn’t this what we need to hear right now? I invite you to read this in the light of the pandemic and see what your heart feels and tells you.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DaLQ1zGMhe8>

SOMETHING EXTRA

One of my favourite cities in the world is New York City. My appreciation for NYC wasn’t always there. It grew over time. My daughter, Taylor-Anne, on the other hand, has a certain impatience and disdain for NYC. She has her reasons.



But, I love New York. SO, here’s a series of videos about NYC as a tribute to a city traumatized by COVID-19. May the Big Apple/Gotham City recover as she did during 9/11.

Times change. The human condition and God never do. Enjoy!

[4k, 60 fps] A Trip Through New York City in 1911 (Feb 23, 2020; Length – 8:35)
This is a fascinating look at what technology can do to bring the past to the present. The sounds and images make it feel like you’re right there. I like how the people look at the camera. It’s as if they’re looking right at you, wondering “Who are you?” and “What are you doing?”

Imagine these people dealing with the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic a few years later.
What would they say to us in our own pandemic?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZ1OgQL9_Cw

New York in 1987 (Oct. 28, 2017; Length – 48:33)

Remember the big hair and the shoulder pads?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=elHK6hlnuc0>

9/11 Timeline: The Attacks on World Trade Center in New York City (Sept 9, 2011; Length – 4:56)

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

New York City 2018: Spring on the Streets of Manhattan (April 21, 2018; Length – 20:01)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D31yAgUjUB4>

New York City During COVID-19 (April 11, 2020; Length – 4:19)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WeDnOy2sztc>

May the Lord bless you and keep you,
may He make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.
May he look upon you with favour and grant you peace.

In the name of the +Father, Son and Holy Spirit.