March 13, 2020

Dear people of Trinity,

I am, by training and experience (and familial inclination), a planner. For years, I made my living as a project manager, mapping out precise workflows for one or two or three year timelines. It was my job to predict and manage the future. Uncertainty was not allowed in that world.

But that’s not the world we’re living in today, is it? Every day brings with it new information, new questions, and new anxieties. There are so many unknowns about the coronavirus/COVID-19, including how long it will be before it’s run its course. Uncertainty is a constant.

The way we manage and respond in this uncertain world is different. It is, as one friend described it, like building an airplane while you’re flying it. I’ve likened this time to hiking across steep and unfamiliar terrain in the dark. To put it in theological terms: we’re walking now by faith.

But here’s the thing: we’re flying or hiking or walking in faith…together. The power of being part of a worshiping community is that we are here with each other and for each other, in partnership with God, who has walked side by side with humanity through gardens and wilderness, across the Sea of Galilee and along the streets of Jerusalem.

In the past couple of weeks, as concerns about the transmission of the coronavirus have heightened, we’ve taken precautions at Trinity to keep parishioners and visitors and staff as safe as possible, including greeting one another with bowing (eliminating physical contact) serving only bread (wafers) at communion (no common cup), and encouraging those who are feeling unwell or particularly vulnerable because of their own health concerns, to stay at home, away from crowds. We’ve also repeated the practical wisdom you’ve heard a million times now: wash your hands; soap and warm water; 20 seconds minimum. (The time it takes to say the Lord’s Prayer!)

Balanced against these practical considerations for keeping ourselves safe and healthy in body is the very real need to come together to nourish our souls, to find solace and hope in the promises and love of God, and in the presence of one another. Especially in times of fear and uncertainty, it is balm and joy to worship corporately—to pray and sing and share the Eucharist—as the Body of Christ.

Body and soul, safety and sanctuary: these are the competing interests we’ve been holding in tension as we’ve considered how to respond to this health crisis and still be the Church.

Still, we take seriously the advice of the CDC and local Santa Barbara county health officials to slow the spread of virus transmission by practicing “social distancing” and to that end we’re implementing the following plan:

- **Our last in-person worship services will be this Sunday, March 15, at 8am and 10am.** The precautions outlined above will be in effect.

- **The 10am service on March 15, will be live-streamed on Facebook,** especially for the benefit of those who have needed to absent themselves from worship. If you’re not a Facebook user, look for an email after the service that will include a link to the recorded service.
  *Remember that all sermons are recorded and posted on Trinity’s website, and can be accessed at any time.*

- Following each of the services on March 15, our **adult formation time** will be a chance to talk, ask questions, and discuss ways to stay connected as a faith community throughout this health crisis. Rev. Sarah Thomas and I will be on hand to lead and guide these discussions.
- Beginning Monday, March 16, Trinity will be suspending in-person worship, meetings, and other events through the end of Lent (April 4). We will continue to evaluate the recommendations of health officials about social distancing, and determine whether the suspension needs to continue, or if in-person worship and meetings will resume. Please be on the lookout for messages from Trinity with additional information. (One exception to this suspension is our Freedom Warming Center ministry; we are scheduled to be a Warming Center site March 31).

- We are working on different ways to worship together remotely, and to check in on one another, and support any special needs through this time. More details will be coming to you soon.

- The church office will remain open and staff will continue to work their regular hours, although some may be working remotely. If you have questions or need assistance, please consider conducting your business via phone or email.

What can you do?

- Stay in touch. Contact friends and neighbors to check that they’re o.k. Let the church know if you—or someone you know—is in need of logistical help (grocery store? pharmacy?) or moral/spiritual reassurance, and we’ll help figure out how to get that done.
  
  *Let us know what would be useful in helping you feel connected, even though you’re not physically in church.*

- Please pray: for those who are sick, and for those who care for the sick. Pray for those whose livelihoods are impacted by this crisis. Pray for those who feel isolated, who don’t have friends or a faith community to call on for help. Pray for scientists and researchers, for their wisdom and perseverance. Pray for everyone who dwells in fear, that they may find their way to hope.

Let me end with a favorite blessing—now more relevant than ever:

Life is short, and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who make this journey with us. So be swift to love, and make haste to be kind. And the blessing of God: who made us, who loves us, and who travels with us, be with you now and always. Amen.

Elizabeth+