

Your Daily Pastoral Epistle: Wednesday, 6 May 2020

Hello Church!

Have you had time to watch the video link for *Building Notre Dame* that Kathy inserted in yesterday's epistle? I hope so. With spring bringing so many good reasons to be outdoors, our viewing hours always tend to drop in May. Add to that how many hours many of us have added using screens for various internet resources, and the exhaustion of looking at one more screen can be emotionally and physically exhausting. While watching the 100th episode of *Fruity Knitting* special on YouTube today, I just couldn't watch and knit through the whole episode as I could in October. Fortunately for me, Andrea and Andrew break their program into manageable 30-minute chunks so I could stop at a good place for resuming tomorrow.

Still, I recommend you watch the PBS video of *Building Notre Dame* as you limit your viewing. You will be better prepared for Sunday's worship podcast. Also, it is exceptionally good wind down after sunset and before bed viewing. If you do any sort of craft while watching television, it is wonderful viewing.

As we first read Psalm 31 on Monday, I asked us all to read beyond the verses listed in *Disciplines 2020*. The bit is a prayer of lament. There are very few examples of laments in the New Testament beyond what Jesus quoted from David's psalms on the cross, so one of the best reasons to read the Old Testament is to learn this way to prayer from the Psalms as Jesus did. Lament is important. It isn't whining, it's being honest with God about what is hard and how we are struggling.

As I read, David's lament appears to come out of a military conflict. But as I read Psalm 31:6-14, the bit of the lament I have felt myself in these weeks of *Safer At Home* is well described in these underlined words in verse 9:

“Have mercy on me, Lord, because I'm depressed.

My vision fails because of my grief,

as do my spirit and my body.”

Yesterday my vision was literally failing. While I did not need a sick day, I did need to stay away from my screens as much as possible and rest my eyes. This morning on *Fruity Knitting*, there was some “best of” footage that included a physical therapist talking underuse injuries as the essential opposite of a repetitive stress injury. Part of my vision problem yesterday was too much close focus work and not long-distance focus, the balance needed to rest my eyes. In the office, Kathy makes a point to counter the sitting at the screening nature

of her job by making a point to take a mini walk in the building to rest her eyes. Her habit is exactly what the physical therapist I watched this morning would recommend for everyone with eyestrain from too much screen time.

Eyestrain was probably not the failing vision David struggled with as he wrote his lament. His struggle was more likely to be vision as one's ability to see beyond one's current circumstances. David observed, "my vision fails because of my grief."

In bereavement being unable to see beyond the moment is the primary symptom in this common cold kind of depression. Experience with this most common and socially acceptable depression can help us cope with the unusual grief many are now finding while *Safer At Home*. The first step to see if yours is a common cold depression is to lift your vision off your grief by doing something for self-care else instead. Acknowledge your grief is there as something that can wait a bit because now that the crisis is passed so has the urgency. You can come back to what it needs you to do after a break. Make your mind leave your depression alone by doing a chore that is a simple act of self-care; planning and making a comfort food supper, washing and carefully styling your hair as best you can today, picking out your clothes for the next week and then doing the laundry needed to fill in the gaps. Garden chores for those of us who have that opportunity is also wonderful. Playing games with your children using your new Zoom skills is another option I have heard of but not been able to try.

Now if these sorts of self-care acts do not help restore your vision, your ability to see beyond our current circumstances, your depression may be more than common cold depression. If so, please call a friend or a professional for help, me included. All pastors are primary care professionals, and I would rather be with you on the phone or screen than have you face the pain of depression alone. We pastors are trained and have acquired skills in the listening you need. And if your depression needs more help than our skills can provide, we also know other capable professionals with more specialized skills who are also wanting to help you.

The truth is that these Daily Pastoral Epistles are written as pastoral care to give you useful suggestions for the care of your spirit through Safer at Home. One way the Lord replies to us as we cry for mercy in our laments is through the "acts of mercy" of another person. As we teach in confirmation, "acts of mercy" are a source of spiritual sustenance for both the person we care for and for ourselves as caregivers.

We are one of the Lord's means of showing mercy as we join in a ring dance of caring. Right now, nurses are the professionals being deeply appreciated for their acts of mercy. In 9/11 it was the firefighters. In school shooting lockdowns it has been a teacher or counselor whose skills helped de-escalate a young person's deep pain. And in success that never makes

the evening news when it works, our Hudson police officers and our St. Croix county sheriffs are also a source of answered prayer for many in trouble when their heart prayer is “Lord in your mercy.”

I need to stop here, I am about to launch into Sunday’s sermon about building blocks in a cathedral. Please watch *Building Notre Dame* and take some time for that self-care chore. And let us pray for all those the Lord will call to answer “Lord in your mercy!”

Grace abounds!

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