

Dear Congregation,

Greetings in Jesus' name—the One who is and is to come and the One who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. One of things that I often tell my students is that some of our greatest learnings about ourselves and our world occur when the “taken for granted reality” of that world is shaken and fractured. And surely for most of us, on a macro level at least, the current coronavirus crisis is a shaking of our reality that we have never experienced on such a scale.

And yet it is in the midst of that shaking that we find more comfort than ever in these words of Scripture that affirm God as sovereign, all powerful, all knowing—the Eternal Creator who is also the Sustainer of this planet and of all of creation who does not change in His love and care and attention.

When I preached two weeks ago that God has brought our congregation across the Jordan River to a place we had never been before, I had no idea that part of that place would include the current crisis that challenges our way of life at almost every level. And yet, the land that the Israelites walked into after they crossed the Jordan River must have felt every bit as uncertain and anxiety producing if not more so! At least we can stay in our homes—before they could do so, they had to first flush out their enemies and risk life and limb for themselves and for their neighbors.

And yet the word that God gave to them before crossing the river is the same word he extends to us today: “Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and courageous!” And God repeats this to Joshua at least two times. Why? Because Joshua was clearly afraid. He was clearly intimidated by the task ahead. God reminds him that He would never leave or forsake Joshua, and indeed God keeps His word to Joshua then and to us today. “Be strong and courageous. I will never leave you or forsake you!” The Church Board has been discerning tirelessly over the past five days to make decisions that are best for our congregation and community in the midst of this time. I want to thank the Board on behalf of the Ministry Team and the congregation for working together so well to arrive at these outcomes and to being so sensitive to God's Spirit in doing so. This has relieved the Ministry Team of the burden of making these decisions and reflects the spiritual capacity of our governing Board to lead effectively and faithfully. This current crisis has given us another opportunity to experience the health of our congregation's leadership and ministry structures which are being led by spiritually sensitive leaders who are being led by Christ! It is my expectation that we will honor our leaders whom God has given to us, and even when we disagree or question their discernment, being part of this congregation means we submit to them.

What a wonderful service on Sunday—perhaps the longest service in modern Etown Mennonite history ☺. I think it was 12:20 p.m. until we closed and still people stayed to visit. It seemed like we were all aware suddenly that our gathering together is not something to be taken for granted, given that we do not know how long it will be until we gather again. I hope you get a chance to listen to it in its entirety to here the testimony of the folks who went to Gator Camp, Heidi sharing about her mission for care ministry and ways for you to be involved, and Kate sharing a word about her vision for worship in our congregation.

The Board has authorized the Ministry Team to reopen our congregation's Facebook site and to administer it as a way of keeping the congregation informed and as place to livestream Sunday services. You will hear more about this later in the week. Thank you for your grace and patience and prayers in this time as we support and care for one another and for the community around us.

The Psalm of the Week is Psalm 143 and the other scriptures are:

Wednesday: Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Thursday: Philemon 8-21

Friday: Joshua 24:14-28

Saturday: Colossians 3:1-17

Sunday: Romans 12

God is with us and we will get through this together with Him!

Blessings,

Conrad