

APRIL 23

Like the first bubbles in a heating pan of water, there are spots here and there where “life is returning to normal” around the world. Various markers or standards are being used to determine what and how much to do. So, what about St. Giles? Bishop Lee addressed that directly yesterday in his weekly ZOOM call with clergy. As I understood him, he said three things:

- 1) It is vital to our common identity as Episcopalians in the diocese of Chicago that we act in concert, as a community of congregations, not self-contained gatherings, and that we do it for the sake of diocesan morale, the common good of our people, and right order as part of the historic Anglican tradition, (he was reminding clergy of our annually renewed vow of obedience to proper Church authority);
- 2) The bishop reiterated his position that he will take guidance from the medical experts and civic authorities regarding any modification of existing orders about churches being closed for worship and other activities;
- 3) He announced the formation of a working advisory group that will focus on how to conduct our worship together in the future. In his private time with the Evanston deanery clergy which followed (St. Giles is part of this group) he invited the deanery to pass along ideas to his working group. An idea I received from one of us at St. Giles came up from another congregation—outdoor worship as weather improves, with special provision made for consecrating communion elements. He has passed that along to his working group.

So, in plain speech, the bishop reminded clergy that he is remaining firm on every congregation being shut down now for the good of all of us, that he will decide on reopening based on medical advice and civil guidance, and he is looking toward reopening with modified worship practices in place.

I know this is hard and that it wears on us all. Things are difficult on many fronts in our lives. Not gathering for worship is debilitating and sad. But may I invite you to remember St. Paul’s word to the Corinthians during a very hard time in their life together?

“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” (II Cor 4:26-18).

Yes, our customary, usual, habitual, comfortable and comforting patterns in life are disrupted, some likely never to return as they were, but our capacities as faithful, resilient, creative, caring, and flexible people is being invigorated by the challenges we face. What we are going through does not compare to what we shall attain in our faithfulness, because the ground of our faith is greater than the real, but not overwhelming, trouble we face.