

## **August 12**

Friends,

Your Vestry and parish musician and parish administrator have done much work and planning to offer a service of Morning Prayer at 10:15 on Sunday, August 16th, on the outside of the St. Giles Church building. I and others will help lead the service.

Please bring a folding chair and plan to wear a mask;

We all must be very careful to maintain our social distancing;

Please bring hand sanitizer or alcohol wipes to use as needed;

Please do NOT come if you have a fever or cough or any other symptom;

There will be an order of service for everyone to use;

There will be some music, but no singing, and no exchange of the Peace (except verbally);

We are not allowed yet to celebrate Eucharist, so our service will be Morning Prayer;

There will be an opportunity to make your offering, but we won't be "passing the plate" as the saying goes;

Regrettably, we are not able to offer a coffee hour after our worship;

Perhaps someone is feeling dismayed after reading this and thinks this hardly seems like church! Believe me, you are not alone in feeling so.

I must tell you that I have thought and prayed about how to respond to that feeling for the many people—clergy and laity—who have shared it with me over the last five months: it doesn't feel like real church, these strategies and plans seem anemic and without much substance, watching mass celebrated on TV is

pretty thin gruel for the soul. Whether we especially love the glorious choral music and soul lifting ritual and stirring organ offerings and stimulating sermons, or most like to be with our friends doing a lovely familiar, community act of prayer and sharing Christ's body and blood, a good many of us feel dislocated and a bit adrift now from what makes us feel spiritually connected and nourished. Well, first thing to say is: the good news is you're normal. Things are not as they were and that is both sad and exhausting.

I believe that the best way to handle our situation is to think of what many people—some still among us—remember as living in wartime. 75-80 years ago, people lived on what they would call "a war footing". Rationing, careful speech, planning out every trip and taking special care not to do risky or wasteful things. Saying to someone being thoughtless, selfish, or greedy, "Don't you know there's a war on?". Make over, make do, do without was the program, do your part was the continual exhortation and expectation. This is our situation now in many respects. Yes, we want to do and go and enjoy life as we knew it, but now there's a pandemic on, and we do our part by dealing with reality and being cheerful and mindful—not fake smiles and rule mindedness—but aware that being careful is good for us and others.

We can be grateful for the health and resources we have committed to helping others carry on as well. This is a time of trouble and hardship, yes, but we can face it together. As the famous poster says: keep calm and carry on.

I think this approach works better than the "clean up after a storm" viewpoint, although there are similarities. In our present situation, we are seeing the pharmaceutical industry re-prioritize research, adjusted ourselves to upsets in our national supply chain, implemented the necessary techniques our medical folk recommend as they learn more, and come to see that the best strategy now is to manage ravages of the disease while we develop better therapies for treatment and eventually—God willing—a vaccine. We know this is a long haul. Hard, unforgiving, demanding, painful, full of loss—after all, there's a war on. We didn't want it or ask for it, but here we are, and we do better together, and we must carry on until the end comes. And the end will come—faster if we pull together and do our part—and our nation and our world will be here at the end.

Let me end by reminding you of a story you know from the book of Genesis. Jacob robbed his older brother Esau of his birthright blessing and had to flee. He wandered. One night he made a stone his pillow and he dreamed of a great ladder reaching the heavens on which countless angels ascended and descended to do the will of God on earth. Upon awaking, Jacob said, "Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it".

What Jacob discovered is that, as the psalmist put it later on, (139:9-11) wherever we go and in whatever circumstance we are, God is there and is at work-both within us individually and our world at large. "This place" can be understood as a description of the physical wilderness Jacob wandered in, but also that part of ourselves wherein we "wander" from the life and outlook and attitudes we held and find ourselves in "new territory". But we are not alone.

" If I take the wings of the morning  
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea  
Even there shall thy hand lead me.  
If I say, Surely the darkness will cover me,  
Even the night shall be light about me.

Our task, as Isaiah the prophet wrote, is "seek the Lord while He wills to be found", and to remember what Paul wrote this week, "the word is very near you". Living our faith is done whatever our circumstances, not only in our most beloved and comfortable situations and settings. Worship involves our heartfelt desire to be "nearer, my God, to thee", and we can share in expressing that desire while sitting six feet apart, on folding chairs, and looking forward to offering mass together one fine day.

Then with my waking thoughts  
Bright with thy praise,  
Out of my stony griefs,  
Beth-el I'll raise (a symbol of dedication and remembrance)  
Then all my song shall be  
Nearer, my God, to thee.

God's peace and joy, friends.

TCHS