



First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

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Staying Connected – Weekly Conference Calls

For updates and prayer, we will hold three weekly conference calls.

One on Sunday at 10:00 AM, one on Monday night at 7:00 PM and
another on Thursday at 2:00 PM.

Here is all you do: Dial 712-770-5505 and then wait for instructions to
enter access code, which is 300904#

Sermon for March 22, 2020 “Choosing Another Fear”

Just as spring is springing, a dark shadow hangs over us. Worry, confusion, rumors and dread may seem to be growing faster than our fragrant flowers. Eleanor Roosevelt is credited with saying, “Do something every day that scares you,” and she said that in a time when polio was threatening many lives. Still, this week has not seemed like the week to follow her advice!

Maybe this week you have felt like Paul felt in 2 Corinthians 7:5, your “bodies have had no rest” and it seems you are afflicted in every way - disputes without and fears within.” What do we do when it seems our whole world seems at risk and the places we felt safe no longer feel safe?

Ancient Israel knew a lot about disasters looming. They knew a lot about being separated from each other and not by choice. They called it exile. They knew a lot about the arrows that fly by day. They knew a lot about pestilence. Yet, they also have this amazing secret that will change our lives in this moment: *they spent more time talking about what or who not to fear than what and who to fear.*

In our Old Testament lectionary from Samuel 16, Samuel is sent out to find a new king. After he looks over Jesse's older sons, God directs him to this unassuming little shepherd boy. “This is the one,” God indicates, who will replace Saul, the first King of Israel who has lost his fear of God, his trust in God's direction and instead has given in to fear to the point he has gone past paranoia into desperation. He becomes so desperate that he eventually seeks the advice of the witch of Endor about what his fearful future will be.

Like Saul, it's easy to be paralyzed with fear. Our world can turn upside down in a moment and we aren't quite sure how to recover. As Shakespeare put it, "Extreme fear can neither fight nor fly." On the surface, we see the faces of fear all around: we are having to keep our distance, move out from our one table to our many tables; we are dreading the news, as we hear of friends losing their jobs, as millions of school children are out of school without food or safe places to live. We are truly afraid our loved ones, church family and friends who work in health care and will likely be exposed to Covid19, will stay safe. We fear for those whose respiratory systems or immune systems are compromised. I don't need to recount this list, for each of you are living this list. Fears all around threaten to paralyze us to the point that we "lose the day in expectation of the night, and the night in fear of the dawn."

But friends, what I call us to do today is to put a new face on our fears. What the scriptures call us to do is to look deeper into the heart of a completely different kind of fear, this profound, reverential respect and trust which the biblical writers refer to as the "fear of the Lord." Only fear the LORD," Samuel writes in I Samuel 12:24, "and serve him faithfully with all your heart; for consider what great things he has done for you." This choice to choose our fears is perhaps one of the most challenging Lenten discipline you have ever practiced. Here it is. When you turn on the news this week, choose to turn up the volume on this wisdom from:

I Peter 3:14: "...Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated."

Or this wisdom from Ps. 46:2: Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea."

Or this wisdom from Ps. 27:3: "Don't be afraid though a whole enemy encamp around you." And maybe this is what COVID19 feels like, a whole enemy threatening to encamp around you. But never forget that if God is your "light and your salvation whom shall you fear? If "the lord is the stronghold of your life; of whom will you be afraid.?"

Instead, First Christian family, let your voice join the voice of the psalmist in Ps. 34:4: "I sought the LORD, and he answered me, and he delivered me from all my fears."

On Wed., Mar. 11, my daughter waited to make sure labor and delivery was cleared from a suspicion that someone there had tested positive for COVID19. There in Labor and Delivery, visitor room usually bustling with balloons and cell phone cameras and excited families were empty. It was a time to hang on to our lectionary reading from Ephesians 5: 8-9: "For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord." It was a time to remember the saying from May Sarton, "Without darkness nothing comes to birth, as without light nothing flowers." Only one person was allowed in the delivery room. I remained at her home and received updates on her labor progress all day Thursday and then the final call came at 8:00 that night. Our grandson Charlie B was delivered. When I saw his first picture, I couldn't help but cry with joy and with hope, I couldn't help but whisper, "Don't let the delivery end. Keep on delivering him Lord from harm, from all the "covids" out there wearing differing masks. Keep all our Charlies safe - the Charlies who go by many names all over the world, in China and Italy as well as in North Carolina. Protect our very young and very old. Deliver all who are vulnerable from this contagion among us. Keep delivering them. Keep delivering us from threats of every kind and from all our fears. Unmask our fears so we may see something deeper under it all - YOU, our maker, YOU the one we will choose to trust over paranoia and panic." The one Samuel chose that day, that little shepherd boy, will flounder around and make some terrible choices, but he will make some good ones too. He will stare down the lions and bears on the hillside trying to keep the sheep safe, and Church, God will give us the courage to do that too. God will give us the courage and grace to stare down the lions and bears that seem so much bigger than we are and the giants we can't even imagine we can face and overcome. But we can and we will trust God - who did not bring this upon us but is surely with us in this. We can trust God, not to put us in protective bubbles, not to mask true pain and suffering, but to keep us safe in the heart of the One who ultimately has our lives.

Together with God, we will and we can have the power to stand up in those places we are finding ourselves, to stand up, even with our knees knocking, knowing there is One greater than all which threatens us or may threaten us, to steady us and strengthen us, with the amazing power to do more than we could imagine to keep the sheep safe, one moment and one day at a time.

Prayers of the Parish: Gracious God, we ask you to heal those who are sick, recovering, awaiting treatments, waiting for test results. Let us pray to the Lord:

We ask that you keep us safe from COVID 19 and protect those who have lost their jobs or are facing other challenges associated with this. For these, let us pray to the Lord.

We ask for wisdom and governance for such a time and for those who make decisions that affect so many – our own government leaders, CDC, WHO, and support agencies. For these, let us pray to the Lord.

We ask you hear the requests of all our hearts, spoken and unspoken, (PLEASE name your own at home) and we ask all according to your will, covered by your grace and mercy and in the Name of Jesus, Amen.

Communion (You may pick up individual communion packs at the entry table at the parking lot entrance Mondays from 10 to 12 or Tuesdays from 10 to 12 or use your own bread and juice at home. You may also drop off your offerings at that time)

Communion Meditation: Even though we are not gathered around one table, we are drawn by one Lord. This week when I saw in house dining was shut down and that all that was available was take out, I was reminded that we too will be “taking our” Lord’s supper in a new way. Just know we are one Body united by One Lord. At home, as you use one of the individual communion packs available for pick up or your own juice and bread, pause a moment to remember all your family communing with you at this moment in our hearts.

Preparing the Lord’s Table with Our Offerings – *In this time we are apart, please remember to share your offerings as regularly as you can by dropping them by the church office from 10 to 12 on Monday or Tuesday of each week, or by calling Wanda for another time, or by mailing in. Wanda will make weekly deposits each week during this time on Wednesday afternoons.*

Words of Institution - On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus took the bread and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “This is my Body broken for you. Eat this in remembrance of me.” (COMMUNE) In the same manner after supper, Jesus took the Cup and when he had blessed it, he gave it to his disciples, saying, “This is my blood of a new covenant, poured out for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sin. Drink it in remembrance of him.” (COMMUNE)

Benediction Prayer: Go in peace, go in safety, go in trust, go in grace. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Announcements and Calendar

We will not hold services through March and will keep you posted beyond that. Weekly meetings have been cancelled and Linda Thigpen has shared that the CWF meetings will not take place in April. If you have questions, call your Group Leaders.

How will we worship together?

1. A weekly Worship Service like this will be copied and available **for pick up at church in the mailbox near the entrance of our parking area, by 4:30 on Friday afternoons before the Sunday service.**

2. These weekly services will go out to the group receiving emails, except for the prayer list by the Friday before the service. *If you are able to receive email and are not already getting newsletter emailed to you, please give Wanda or Penny your email.* This will allow us to save costs on printing.

3. This service, except for the prayer list, will also be posted on our website each week, along with an audio version of the sermon which will be linked to *Facebook*.