

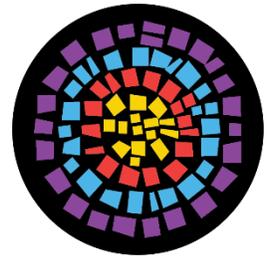
*As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?*

...

*These things I remember
as I pour out my soul:
how I used to go to the house of God
under the protection of the Mighty One
with shouts of joy and praise
among the festive throng.*

*Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will again praise him,
my Savior and my God.*

Psalm 42



To all the saints at FPC in Pottstown,

Grace and peace to you through our Lord Jesus Christ, who is no stranger to the wilderness, and through God the Eternal One, who holds the present and the future as God held the past, and through the Spirit who binds us together while we are absent one from another.

How we have missed you this week! We have missed your company and laughter, missed listening to the Word with you, breaking bread with you, meeting with you to do our kingdom work, learning and growing with you in conversations on faith, and most of all, we have missed gathering in the sanctuary to worship and sing and pray with you. These plaintive words of the psalmist -- written in his own time of separation and isolation from the people of God -- echo in us as we live into this new season of being cut off God's house and from one another. "These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God...with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng!"

But as the psalm progresses, the psalmist has a good talk with his soul: "Why are you downcast? Why are you so disturbed? Put your hope in God, for I will again praise him, my Savior and my God." This situation will not last forever, he says to himself. And in the meantime, he remembers where to put his trust. When he does, he finds a quiet center.

Sisters and brother, we have so much to talk about with you: information to give, ideas for ways to be Church in this virus season, joys and concerns to share for your prayers. But first, we want to ask, is it well with your soul? Are you able to find your way to the quiet center in which you are able to hope and trust in God? Are you finding your way to the "streams of water" for which your soul thirsts, and which Christ has opened for you?

God's grace, and the gift of faith, are given to us for a time such as this. Unlike the psalmist in his day, our access to the presence of God is not through a temple or a building, but through the Holy Spirit which the Risen Christ has poured out upon us. We can come into God's presence anywhere, anytime, because God has come to be present with us -- walking the dusty roads of Palestine, or cloistered in the four walls of our home.

So the first thing we want to talk about is ways we can tap into the streams of water flowing in us. Mercifully, we live in an age of technological marvels which can help us tend to our soul's thirst.

1. **Worship.** We need to worship and pray with one another to live. (There is a reason houses of worship are included in the "life-saving" category.) So the staff and we have worked this week to set up the capability of worshiping online through a new YouTube channel "First Presbyterian Church Pottstown". There is a link to subscribe at the bottom of this email.

Included in this mailing is an **order of service** which you can use as you join us for a simplified Service of the Lord's Day on Sunday morning -- we are calling it **House Church**, remembering the way the earliest Christians gathered to worship in each other's homes. By 10:30 on Sunday, a link to the YouTube channel will be posted on the church website, fpcpottstown.org. Click on that link, grab your order of service, and join us for worship. You can also just go directly to the First Presbyterian Church Pottstown YouTube channel.

We are also sending in this mailing a copy of the **hymn** we will sing -- we hope you will sing along from where you are, and support (or drown out) our feeble voices. This is a worship service, not entertainment 😊. Deb Voytko will accompany us, so we can lift our voices as well as our hearts. Jaylee has attached an **activity sheet** for the children, and we will do our best to have a Time with Children -- without children. We suspect it will take a few services to grow into this together, but we can do that. Let's see what happens.

Many have asked, "What about Easter?!" Of course, we do not yet know the restrictions that will be in effect at Easter. But you can bet we are thinking about it. We are Easter people, after all, and *Easter is our day!* It will not be cancelled.

2. **Prayer and Word.** Writer Anne Lamott has said, "*Courage is fear that has said its prayers.*" We know that to be true. During this week, we have missed our times of prayer in the lectio divina circle, in Bible studies, in Wednesday Evening Prayer, in staff meetings. We look forward to when we can do that again, and in the coming weeks we will explore possible ways to meet online.

But for the time being, we are grateful for resources such as these:

PCUSA Daily Prayer app. This app is free, and can be found in the App Store. Our extended family has downloaded it, and we have met several nights this week via Skype to do the evening prayer service together. What a gift.

Be aware that you can adjust the settings to your own preferences, and there are orders for morning, midday, evening, and close of day prayer.

Daily scripture reading. The PCUSA website has the list of daily lectionary readings. If you are not able to access it, send us an email and we will send it to you.

Lent devotional books. There are a number of copies sitting on the table in the lobby at church. We would be glad to send one to you.

Lent prayer exercises. Amy Shutt is making available to us the prayer exercises she had prepared for the Lent circle on praying with the imagination. We are attaching one with this mailing.

The Labyrinth. A couple people have told us that they have found it meaningful to come to the church and take a prayer walk on the beautiful labyrinth Polly Gower has made possible for us. What a lovely way with God to be outside in this spring air.

3. Care for One Another and our Neighbors

Joys and Concerns. We do not want to post our church family's joys and concerns online, so we will send them to you in our weekly mailing. To be added to our email list, please email webmaster@fpcpottstown.org.

Connecting with each other. We encourage you, no, we *ask* you, to find ways to connect with one another in a personal way. Will you commit 'adopting' one another, being particularly mindful of those who are vulnerable or who live alone, and make it a spiritual practice to connect with them regularly? The best way is to pick up the phone. Or take a walk, if you are able. We have been so uplifted this week by our daily walks in different neighborhoods, connecting with church members -- at a safe distance from their door, checking in to see if they need anything, and offering them a blessing. We come home from these walks refreshed in body and spirit. (Check out the photos of your church family members on the church facebook page.)

Caring for our Neighbors. This week, we have been part of several responses to the care for vulnerable neighbors. As we mentioned, we have adapted the way of serving **Community Meals**. The mission committee has sent a contribution to the **Main Street Ministries**, as housing needed to be found for those who were affected by the closure of the shelter. We have also had a conference call with Pottstown Clergy and John Armato of the **Pottstown School District**, and reached out to **Operation 143**, to discuss how we can partner with efforts to feed the alarming number of children in the district and their families who experience hunger. Stay tuned for more information about that.

Caring for ourselves. We are so grateful to God in every season, but especially in this season, that we have our parish nurse, Dawn Skelly heading up our Health Ministry Team, and physicians who are gracious and generous with their guidance. Dawn has gathered some wisdom which will help us care for ourselves as our daily lives take new shapes and forms.

4. Mechanics.

The Building. The building is closed. The Session has empowered a Response Team, which includes some elders and medical personnel, to make decisions regarding exemptions to this closure. With the guidance of this team, we have established a new way of serving Community Meals. This will be reviewed as time goes along.

The Staff. Our wonderful, dedicated, congenial staff is still working remotely. Tom Spitko is following CDC protocols for disinfecting the building during this closure. Marie is safeguarding herself as she has begun radiation, but the mail, email, and voicemail are being checked regularly. And if you need something and cannot reach us via the church office, give us a call.

Offerings. Some of you have asked (and thank you for asking!) how you can continue to give your offerings. First, offer yourselves. Cultivate a spirit of graciousness and gratitude and

generosity before God and towards one another. This may become especially necessary within your own homes, if the quarantine continues!

And, continue presenting your offerings of time, talent, and treasure. This is God's desire not only for those who will benefit from your gifts, but also for you and your spiritual well-being. Your offerings enable you to be part of the demonstration God's providential care to others. Indeed, through our offerings, we are able to be those angels who ministered to Jesus in the wilderness. Checks can be mailed in and will be counted, but we especially encourage you to give online. The church website has instructions to help you through the process.

At the same time, we are all keenly aware that some of us find themselves in a financially fragile position at the moment, and may need to delay or adjust our giving in this season. On the other hand, some of us who are able to offer more may be led to do so. In whatever way we are able to express our trust in and gratitude to God, we will pray for the Spirit to grant us the wisdom to use them according to God's purposes for us in this time.

Finally, sisters and brothers, we remind you of God's promise to never fail or forsake us, a promise he sealed forever in Jesus Christ. And we offer you a blessing, using the words of Paul:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, you may abound in hope,
this day, and in the days to come.

The peace of Christ be with us all,
Kerry and Carter