

Friends,

We suddenly can't worship together in person. We suddenly are facing, in a sharp and difficult way, our own vulnerabilities and uncertainty. This is not an easy time.

So I wanted to reach out first to say – you are all in our thoughts and hearts and prayers. Mary Lee and I have food and essentials (and lots of books!), and are as comfortable as can be for the duration. I started writing some thoughts I've had rattling around in my head, first for myself, and also for the "We Make the Road by Walking" group – and then it occurred to me that a few others might find these thoughts helpful as well.

If this doesn't speak to you, no worries. If it does, I'm glad I could help a bit.

Though I'm struggling with things, I'm also trying to be open as I can be to the lessons of this time. If our lives are quieter, can we better hear God in the quiet? I hope so. So here are some thoughts that have helped me, and I thought might help you as well.

- I practice a form of Christian contemplative meditation/prayer called Centering Prayer. But I've also had a lot of trouble stilling myself to sit and be present of late – totally normal, but honestly, a frustration at a time when I'd like solace. **So my first order of business is self-compassion.** This is a difficult experience and a difficult time, and the uncertainty is pretty awful. What can we do to soothe ourselves? The answers will be as different as we are. I'm making sure I still take my daily walks. I'm going to return to reading something besides the news. At Mary Lee's prompting, I'm going to experiment a bit more in the kitchen.
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- **I'm trying to be present to whatever arises for me.** I breathe in, I breathe out, and I remind myself that all my reactions are normal. I've felt waves of grief, waves of anger, waves of despair. And when I've allowed these to arise and pass through me, I've felt the gentle hand of God.

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- There are no guarantees here. I may never get the virus. I may get it and have minimal symptoms. I may end up in the hospital. I may not survive. I simply don't know.
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- But "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).
- **I'm working to find things to give structure and purpose to this time.** Hence this email.
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- Yesterday, our NJ priest upended my day by calling me unexpectedly at 9 am to ask me to provide remote technical validation as he set up a broadcast of our amended 10 am service. This wasn't how I'd planned to spend my morning, but after all the frenzy ended, I realized I was calmer and more centered than I'd been in days. I'd been able to do something useful, something that helped others.
- **I'm focusing on being kind.** We're all scared and tense and maybe even snippy. But we do have a choice here.
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- I have to go to the store today to get some fresh food. I'll try to smile and bless the people I meet there. I'll be patient with myself if I fail, because some people may be a little tough to love just now. I'll simply try again.
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- Mary Lee read me an article this morning that along with runs on toilet paper, some people are racing to buy guns and ammo. One man interviewed insisted he needed to protect himself if someone wanted to take his Target purchases.
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- Okay, this is extreme, and that's why it's newsworthy. But again, we have a choice. Everyone is frightened. I'm going to try to act with kindness. We're all in this together. Jesus told us that not

only was he the light of the world, we all are as well. No time like the present to remind myself of that.

Mary Lee and I send you love and blessings, and peace despite these difficult times.