

Acts 2:42-27

The Coming of a New World: Preaching in the Age of COVID-19

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Come Holy Spirit...

These days, I am readily distracted and sleeping poorly. I'm sardonic, sarcastic, testy and cranky. It is a time when I long to be comforted by our God. Yet I find it near impossible to pray. When I pull myself over to my place where I pray when I am inside, I sit for a moment, then decide I need more tea, a different book to aid my meditations, a pencil sharpener so that I might have a fine point on the pencil as I write deep thoughts that never come, because I've decided that it's been at least 16 minutes since I last checked my Facebook feed. It is not an easy time. And I am sheltered, salaried, working on a screen and safe. But still it's a hard time. And so, I do the best I can. What about you?

A pandemic only ever crossed my mind in my occasional forays into some luscious science fiction. But here we are, you and me, not science fiction anymore, but a creeping, looming reality.

In this world, what might it mean? For better or worse, is this the creation of a new reality?

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common...

Thus Luke, the author of the Acts of the Apostles, describes the coming together of the early believers, the followers of the Way of Jesus of Nazareth, the forming, the creating of a new reality. Those early ones devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and fellowship to the breaking of the bread and the prayers and awe came upon them. People were drawn to them, to a new way of being, and connecting, a new way of living. Thus began the Way of Christ, the start of Christianity.

What if this too is the start of something new? What if this pandemic, this virus is the catalyst for us to start a new phase of Christianity? A rethinking of mainline Protestantism, or even, what if, what is happening right now, this wretched virus, this insane pandemic is the accelerant for the creation of a different way of being people of faith in the Southeast corner of the state of Michigan? What it?

We who live through this pandemic, and I realize there is no guarantee for anyone of us; that you, or I, may not survive. But if we do survive, if we are alive on the other side we will be a people forever changed, forged in a crucible of sadness, fear, generosity, and grace.

There is much that I long to return to, when this pandemic is done. I want to touch people, love people, be in close proximity to people. I want to pray together, sing together, break bread together. There is so much I miss about before.

And I know in this pandemic the stark inequities of our communities have also been revealed:

the thousands of people in our state without enough food;
the precarious nature of small, local businesses,
the extreme vulnerability of elderly people in our communities,
the differences in access to health care if you happen to be a poor person
or a person with brown or black skin,
the lack of a living wage for so so many of our essential workers,
the inability for some of our children to continue their education because they have almost no access to computers and the internet at home.

We've know about these disparities, I've known, but life is complex, solutions are complicated and frequently these issues are lost in the shadows of life, unless, of course it happened to be your life. Now, as this virus scours our earth, the shadows are gone, the truth is clear.

As a people of faith we who follow the Way of Jesus, we who believe in the power of resurrection and new life, here is the time for us to name now what we see and boldly to re-imagine our priorities, communities and ministries.

Altering our sensibilities, changing our priorities, will be one very real, tangible way of honoring all of our sisters and brothers who have died from this virus. COVID-19 is our clarion call for change, even as we are overwhelmed with grief.

What gives me hope, in the midst of this grief and loss, what gives me hope in all of this, is that even now we are living our lives differently. Partly because we are afraid of contracting and succumbing to this disease, but also because the vast majority of people in this state, and of our faith communities, have an abiding need to do the right things. To love our neighbors as ourselves. To honor people who need to leave their homes to work and to stay home if we don't. Even though it is now permitted most of us are not out golfing or boating, (I'm certainly not kayaking.). Instead we are making choices to curtail the activities of our lives so that the spread of this contagion will be slowed and our hospital systems are not overwhelmed, so that those of us who do get sick will have a fighting chance of getting well.

I am watching people, faithful people fast from some of our most sacred rites and rituals. I am watching us give up being with each other for now. We have temporarily foresworn worshipping in our holy places. We are daily structuring our lives around truly loving each other. I am so very sad about all of this, heartbroken at having not had Eucharist for almost two months. I'm sad and yet grateful all at the same time. Look at what we are doing, how we are being there for each other. Saying body and soul that your life matters more than our corporate or personal faith practices and piety. We are

making choices to alter our lives so that others may live. When was the last time we ever did that?

That is my hope and that is my prayer: May we choose to enter this coming phase of our new world by adjusting our priorities and working to eliminate the stark disparities of our communities. May we reform and renew our faith communities, may we enter this new time filled with awe, fueled by God, embodying Jesus' overflowing generosity so that we will know and all will see that everyone, all, all, all of us are God's beloved, God's children. All of us are God's Holy people.

In Christ's Name, I pray. Amen.