

Good morning everyone! Welcome to the very first, world premiere of Mt. Zion-line, our online video worship resource.

I would love to begin our time together with prayer, so please join me in prayer:

*Good and Gracious God, it is good for us to gather as your beloved in community. We treasure your presence with us in word and meal, song and prayer. Be with us in these days when gathering together as often as we would like is not possible. When we must be apart for reasons of safety, we trust that you surround us with your sheltering wings. Encourage us in connecting as we are able, reaching out to our neighbors in need and being persistent in prayer. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our constant companion. Amen.*

It is truly a delight to be able to provide this online resource for you in these absolutely unprecedented times. For our video today, we will begin with a message/reflection, move into Scripture readings and a spiritual practice, and end once again in prayer. We are working on being able to provide live music as part of our future videos - we need to work out the details on our licensing to stream the music since it is copyrighted, but I have every confidence our talented musicians will be able to share their gifts for our Wednesday evening worship experience.

As we begin today, I want to start by saying thank you. Thank you all for your flexibility, support, and willingness to boldly try something new for the sake of loving our neighbors. Thank you especially to all of you stepping up and going above and beyond to provide ministry at this time, including Andrea Goetz our fearless custodian, and Anna Peterson our loving secretary. Thank you! While it might be overwhelming and disorienting to change so many things of our daily life due to this covid-19 coronavirus, our effort of social distancing is the absolute best way we can support and love our neighbors right now. It's rooted in our Christian faith to love and serve our neighbors, as Jesus did so often for the sake of many.

Many of us may not get the coronavirus, and if we did, we would experience it as a mild pneumonia or cold. But there are also many of us whose very lives depend on these social distancing actions. Social distancing is the best way we can prevent the spread of the virus and contain the cases that already exist.

A few weeks ago, in the context of a discussion on political divisiveness, I made the comment to a friend that I didn't think there was anything at all that could unite our entire country. Well, happily I was proven wrong, and I have also vowed to never make comments like that ever again. None of us have ever seen such collective, immediate, disruptive action for the sake of public health and we pray that we never have to again. But at its core, our willingness to take these actions for the sake of our neighbor are rooted in love. We are united in the fact that we want to protect people from illness and harm, and what a gift that we get to be part of it. What a time to be alive, truly!

I am encouraged by the fact that our Lutheran heritage is rooted, fundamentally, in doing church differently. Doing things in new and loving ways is part of the very way we worship and understand God. “Necessity is the mother of invention,” the ancient saying goes, and we are part of inventing ways to fill the necessities of prayer, spiritual wellness, and human connection in this very weird and isolating time. The necessity of Martin Luther’s time was corruption in the larger church that caused him to do things differently. And today it’s a virus that is causing us to radically, boldly love our neighbors and follow public health guidelines to keep us all safe and healthy as we can.

While there is significant anxiety with any sorts of changes or very sudden newness, there is one thing in which we can rest our worries and our fears. One thing that will always stay faithful and true and present with us. That one thing is God. God who created us and knew us from the time we were knit in our mothers’ wombs. God who loves us so deeply and dearly that he gave his only Son so we may not perish but have eternal life. God who makes love known in the promises of baptism, and the new life we receive from Christ’s death and resurrection. God who is with us in our very breath, the Holy Spirit of life who grounds us and centers us in these very real promises.

And while we can, of course, rely on God and these promises, it doesn’t take away the discomfort and overwhelming nature of this unknown situation. None of us have ever encountered something like this in our lifetimes and so we all are just trying to figure it out together.

And I pray that we can see one another through this lens of just trying to figure things out. We are all on a similar page right now, filled with questions and newness, nervousness and anxiety. We feel vulnerable when so many of the fundamental pieces of our lives are changed and dictated differently in the matter of just a few days or hours or even minutes.

I’m convinced this vulnerability is the answer to “why toilet paper?!” Seriously, we face a global pandemic and quarantine and social distancing mandates and toilet paper is the first thing we are going for. In a way, I respect that people know their and their family’s bodies well enough to respect their natural processes and are planning accordingly. In another way I wonder why this paper product that is so often associated with embarrassment? TP on your shoe is the classic embarrassing thing, and unless you’ve recently had a young kiddo, talking about the actions that pre-necessitate using the TP is not exactly common or open. But I believe people are stocking up to protect what is vulnerable to them. And if we’re thinking about our vulnerabilities in this time of social distancing, how can we bravely join together in loving one another through these vulnerabilities?

It’s vulnerable to admit your anxiety. It’s vulnerable to face that your wages might be cut due to workplaces across the country closing down. It’s vulnerable to realize you may not be able to leave your home because your immunity is down. It’s vulnerable to not have any idea what to do with a completely messed-around schedule. It’s vulnerable to admit that you’re kind of afraid because there are so many unknowns with this pandemic.

But naming your vulnerabilities is brave. It's rooted in truth. That's what makes it so scary, because we are looking right into what the truth is in our hearts and at our cores. We are facing the truth of this pandemic by completely reorganizing our lives. We see the truth in public health measures' effectiveness, even though at the end of the pandemic it will hopefully look like we overreacted due to the very low loss of life. But our ultimate truth is Jesus Christ. In Christ alone do we find new life by the power of the God who created us and loves us. Jesus is always there for us. We find truth in this human and divine person, Jesus, who took on the ultimate vulnerability of public torment and death for the sake of all our sins, for the love of all humanity. The truth is the new life that comes from Jesus' resurrection. There is power in Jesus' name and in calling upon God in times of trial and distress. Jesus is the way, the truth, the life.

So let's lean into the truth of our experiences right now. Let's not be afraid to admit where we are feeling vulnerable because vulnerability is at the root of genuine human relationship and connection. Reach out to your church family, give them a call or text and say you're thinking about them or holding them in prayer. Let's truly be the church together, connected as one body of Christ, and root ourselves in love for God and one another.

Beyond prayer and human connection, leaning on the living Word, the written Word of God is one of the best ways we can be comforted and supported, no matter where we are. So I would love to introduce you to and encourage you to try a spiritual practice called *lectio divina*, or "dwelling in the Word". Dwelling in the Word is a practice of reading a passage of Scripture a few times through, perhaps once or twice out loud with different voices, perhaps just in your head as a meditation, whatever feels right to you in the moment. And after the dwelling, answer some questions about the scripture.

For our *lectio divina* today, I would love for you all to ponder Philippians 2:1-13, and I've provided some questions for meditation and consideration below.

*If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.*

*Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,*

*so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

*Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

Some questions to consider:

What is a word or phrase that stood out to you in this passage? Why?

What does it mean to humble yourself?

How do you feel God is at work in you?

Part of the practice of *lectio divina* is sharing your answers to the questions, sharing your ponderings with other people. So I would encourage you to reach out to a sister or brother in the congregation, have a conversation over the phone, and share in this scripture together. Or use this scripture and questions to spend prayerful time together as a family while you're at home due to social distancing. I would also love to hear how this practice went for you - feel free to send me an email any time!

And now I would love to end our time together this morning in the same way we started, by praying for the church, those in need, and all of God's creation.

*God, you are the healer of our every ill. We pray for all people suffering from illness of any kind, in mind, body, or spirit. We pray for all those who have been diagnosed with the Covid-19 coronavirus, for all who suffer from anxiety about its spread, and for all people who have been displaced and negatively impacted by social distancing measures. Lord we lift to you the very real concerns and anxieties of this age, that we may be filled with your peace, the peace which surpasses all understanding and gives us hope eternal. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.***

*God our holy Father, we lift to you caregivers of every kind. We pray for all healthcare workers, nurses, doctors, administrators, therapists, support staff, all people who care for our health. We pray for all who care for people in the informal ways, accompanying those they love and supporting them through the realities of daily life. We thank you for their gifts, skills, and training, and may your Holy Spirit empower them to serve you and others in all they do. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.***

*God our great comforter, come to the help of your people who are grieving. We pray for all people who are grieving the loss of a loved one, especially the family and friends of Lucy Larson who died this week. God we lift to you the names of the people in our community who are in need of your loving care: George, Walt, Rich, Ole, Pam, Vera, Jim, Becky, Stacy, Nickki, Emily, Dianna, Judy, Dodie, Rebecca, Terry, Chad, Mark and Marge, Sandy, Barb, Laura, and Gwen. As we journey through grief and the unsure nature of illness, Lord, we find that the path is not*

*always linear, but no matter where the turns may lead we are confident that we will always find your empowering presence. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.***

*God our creator, we give you thanks for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, who came to live among us, your beloved people. We are thankful for the gift of your unending grace, and your love, strong enough to defeat even death and the grave. Help us to find rest and comfort in the power of new life, through the risen life of your Son Jesus, and in your promises to love us endlessly. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.***

*Into your hands, gracious God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy and peace. Through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord, Amen.*

And finally, if you are missing music this morning, we are still working on how to provide music as part of our online worship experience. We plan to have musical components as part of our next live worship video this Wednesday evening at 7pm, here on Facebook Live. But for now, please find YouTube links in the comments to two songs that have provided me comfort and hope in the past week and beyond. I hope they minister to you as they have to me.

“Forever on Your Side” by NEEDTOBREATHE  
“Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)” by Hillsong United

And now dear brothers and sisters, may the Lord bless you and keep you. May God’s face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May God look upon you with favor, and give you peace, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

May peace be with you all. Amen.