

Pastor Kris Litman-Koon
Date: 22 March 2020
Lesson: John 9:1-41

Whether we find ourselves today within a vehicle, or whether we find ourselves in a room watching or reading this worship service, this is weird. The routines of life are upended. For instance, if you are joining us in the parking lot today, look at the occupants in the vehicle next to you. Give them a smile and a wave; that is the closest that different households at All Saints will come to each other today, which is a weird thought. Now consider this: that person may appear from the waist up to be dressed in their Sunday-best for today's worship, but you have no idea if they are wearing pajama bottoms or their favorite cut-off denim shorts today. That is weirder. To meet you in that awkwardness, most of you on any given Sunday have no idea whether or not I'm wearing my favorite denim cut-offs under my alb.

So things can be weird right now. Yet, more importantly, things can be scary. We don't know what the extent of the impacts will be. Yet God is with us. We don't know how close this will come to us or to our loved ones. Yet God is with us. We don't want unnecessary suffering, so collectively we commit ourselves to a life-or-death goal of flattening the curve. And God is with us. Emmanuel.

Pastor Ginger and I, like many of you, have fears. Even as I speak these words today, there are still anxieties resonating within me. The other night, I was too worked up over all this that I didn't even want to attempt to go to my bedroom. I knew that there was no way I could rest. So I paused.

Emmanuel.
God is with us.
God will see us through this.
God is with us.
Emmanuel.

I had to allow my mind to wander through that parallelism several times before I was in a new mental state and I could finally go to my bedroom for rest.

Our next hymn contains words that I hope you will pay attention to. The words are directed toward that God who is with us. “When this cup [of life] you give is filled to brimming with bitter suffering, hard to understand, we take it thankfully and without trembling out of so good and so beloved a hand.” I feel there is no more fitting image for us to ponder today, than that one. Life itself is a gift from God. Sometimes it is hard to understand the sufferings that come with it. But do not allow those sufferings to lead you to believe that the giver of life is anything less than good and loving.

Our gospel lesson begins today with the disciples asking the question, “Who sinned?” Was this man born blind because of his sin or his parents’ sin? Notice what is inherent in that question. It assumes that God would impose blindness as a punishment. It assumes that God encounters us first and foremost as vengeful, possibly angry. The question assumes that God the Father is less than good and loving. “Who sinned?” is a ridiculous question from Jesus’ point of view. Jesus responds to it somewhat cryptically. “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.” God’s works will become publicly manifest through this man. Jesus is not so concerned about the disciples’ question of “why?” as much as he is concerned about God’s works being revealed.

I can’t tell you what the future will bring, and I can’t tell you that everything will return to normal. But I stand here to proclaim that the works of God will be revealed even in the midst of fear, sufferings, and unknowns. God’s works have a tendency -- and the audacity -- to promise life in the darkest of circumstances. As Christians, we have the stubbornness to always point to our executed Lord and say that on that cross -- of all places -- is God’s offering of life.

Our faith has a tendency to point to “the works of God” revealed in awful circumstances. Much of the New Testament and the Church’s history tells of Christians

being present in the worst of circumstances in order to give witness to the works of God. The light is more easily seen when it shines from dark places. When like today there are calls for isolation, how can we -- who always bear the title of Christian -- still show compassion for the sick and the poor? How can we still be the advocate for the forgotten? How can we still show the bonds of community?

Distancing ourselves is oddly the primary way that we can show care for the poor in this circumstance. Doing so is how our most vulnerable neighbors receive the most protection. However, we need to think through how showing care and witnessing to God's works goes beyond just that first step. That means being creative. How can God's works be creatively revealed through us during this time to those suffering from anxiety, from depression, or those who are now restricted to a home with an abuser in it? How can God's works be creatively revealed so that people encounter in us not selfishness, but words and actions that lift them up and bring them dignity? How can God's works be creatively revealed through us, so that the poor are not jettisoned off to figure out their own survival? We are in circumstances that beg us to be creative in order to keep to our calling.

There have already been displays of creativity in keeping the bonds of community. For instance, between the founding of All Saints in 1975 up until a week ago, did anyone here ever think that All Saints would be doing drive-in worship? Like so many other communities of faith, we are trying new ways to remain in community -- and perhaps grow in community -- while still doing our part to heed the advice of local officials. Of course you've heard of congregations streaming worship online. There are daily prayer services being offered. Emails. Blog posts. You name it. This is a unique opportunity for us all to see how wide and diverse the Body of Christ is. The one caution I offer you is this: there are already some Christian leaders who are decrying this pandemic as God's judgment of some sort; there are others who are preying on your fears to try to lure you in. "Could this be a plague sent from God? Tune in to find out!" Walk away from those. Jesus didn't have any

time for that nonsense, and you shouldn't give it any of your time either. God is good. God is loving. God is with us.

Pastor Ginger and I will make sure that All Saints will -- to the best of our ability -- still have community. We will have corporate worship even if it must be done through analog radio waves or binary code. We will roll out other opportunities of being community this week. I assure you that All Saints will still have community. Yet, as a pastor, an increasing concern of mine is that communities of faith will focus only on whether they maintain their community, be satisfied when it is being done, and not think twice about the rest of our calling: creatively caring for our neighbor in need during this trying time. I don't have an easy answer on how All Saints will continue our care for others, but I hope you will prayerfully ponder that with me in the coming days. Let your pastors and the lay leaders of this congregation know your ideas if there is anything we can do collectively yet remotely.

After offering us the image of receiving a cup filled with bitterness from God's good and beloved hand, our next hymn then goes on to say to God, "Yet when again in this same world you give us the joy we had, the brightness of your sun, we shall remember all the days we lived through and our whole life shall then be yours alone."

This time is scary. It's weird. We will collectively endure it. All our days -- the good and the bad -- belong to God, and they are a gift from God. God is good, God is loving. God is revealing a light of hope in dark times. Cling to that and witness to it, my beloved siblings in Christ.

Emmanuel.
God is with us.
God will see us through this.
God is with us.
Emmanuel.

Thanks be to God. Amen.