

Newsletter by Quarantining

April 2020

To our Sisters and Brothers at Zion Lutheran Church,

Our streets are far less crowded and most workplaces shuttered as we follow Governor Cuomo's directives to minimize the transmission of the COVID-19 virus. Our individual and collective worlds have been significantly changed and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future. With so much in flux, patience will be key and remaining focused on the things most important to us essential. Paul describes this call clearly in his letter to the Colossians, Chap. 3: 12: "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience." We can choose these values to guide our response to this difficult challenge.

As mentioned in last week's letter, while not gathering at Zion's physical church home, our worship and the work of our church continue. Some updates for you:

-we enter our second week of Zion volunteers placing phone calls to all our congregants. We will continue to check-in, stay connected, and ask for any prayer requests. If you prefer not to receive a call, or not on a weekly basis, please do let your call volunteer know this. Our feelings won't be hurt! If you would like to take an even more active role in maintaining the work of our church, please let your call volunteer know. This might take the form of making calls yourself, writing cards, offering prayers, or sharing materials that you are finding helpful in maintaining your spiritual practices. Even if you are receiving materials from us via email or by checking our website (www.zionlutheranNy.org), we are happy to continue contacting you by phone.

-starting this Sunday, we invite our Zion family to join in virtual or remote worship services. Accompanying this letter, you will find several resources to help with our continued worship. These will come in one of two forms: via the US Postal service or via email with attachments. Let your call volunteer know your preference. Here's what you will receive:

-a template that will serve as an outline of the service for this and subsequent Sundays. We ask that you please keep this handy for reuse in the future. The template includes sections to be repeated each week, including the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, a placeholder for the readings of that week, possibly hymns, and a placeholder for The Prayers of the People. (Please share your prayer requests when called by our volunteer.) A huge "thank you" to Jim and Kim Marscher, and the Worship & Music committee, for creating the worship template.

-a list of the readings for upcoming Sundays. (We may send the readings for several Sundays at once to cut down on mailing and copy costs. Music may also be suggested, and possible links on Zion's website or Facebook page for those with computers.)

-when available at the time of mailing, we will send the sermon prepared by our call pastors.

-if possible, we suggest that you engage in this "virtual worship" service each Sunday at 10:00 AM, the time of our regular Sunday worship. In that way, you'll know that fellow members of Zion will be worshipping with you at the same time.

-we are also providing links to two "remote" services that you can participate in via your computer. Pastor Anita, our transition pastor and serving full-time at Our Saviour Lutheran Church here in Utica, has generously agreed to have Zion members join their service via the Zoom platform. If you have access to a computer, go to <https://oslcutica.appspot.com> and look for the Zoom link on their webpage to join the remote service at Our Saviour Lutheran Church this Sunday at 10:00 AM:

-Kim Ritchie, our council secretary, contacted her previous church in Wisconsin, Unity Lutheran Church. They have also generously invited members of Zion to join in their remote worship service. To access that service, use the following link. Their service is 9:30 Central/10:30 EST. <https://unitybrookfield.org/livestream.php>

-Pastor Jennifer DeWeerth will be serving as our call pastor for Easter Sunday, April 12. For those with access to a computer, we are planning to offer a “live” service via the Zoom platform and will provide instructions as we get closer. We will be mailing the Easter Sunday materials for those wanting them via the US Postal service. Her sermon for this Sunday is included in the Service of the Word, included in this communication.

-Your Neighbors continues to operate out of Zion’s kitchen and will do so for as long as possible. Meals continue to be prepared and available for delivery at the present time.

-Our office is closed, and Sara is working from home. If you need to pass along a message or request, please do so on Zion’s webpage (under Tab for Contacting Us) or by passing along the message to your call volunteer when you are contacted.

-While our building is closed, the work of the church continues. As such, your continued stewardship contributions are essential. Here’s a message from Zion’s Stewardship Committee:

Zion is a Lutheran faith community fully committed to serving God and each other. We are called to be at our best during trying times. We will be responsive to public health concerns, the needs of others, and the work of our church.

We will keep you apprised of how we are maintaining our missions such as Your Neighbors, Food Pantry, and Worship through the US mail, emails, weekly phone calls and online including our Website, Facebook, and other links. This will ensure the maintenance of the spiritual connection between us and the faith community at large.

We need to be strong and brave during this challenging time, remaining armed with a faithful determination to emerge in a better place when the crisis is over. To do this, we must be generous with our time, talent and treasure, all God’s gifts to a hopeful people. Please contact us if you can help, and continue to send monetary donations to Zion by check, tithe.ly (found on our webpage under the Donate tab), or by direct payment via your financial institution.

While we wish this COVID-19 health crisis was not part of our current reality, unfortunately, it is. A heartening aspect of this otherwise terrible development has been the responsiveness of people in our congregation, our local and national communities, and around the world to care for one another. You only need to check the internet or listen to news to see artists and musicians sharing their craft, authors reading their work to kids, testimonials about the generosity of strangers, the heroism of front-line medical professionals, and those still needing to work to provide the essentials for people to live through this. We have our heroes here at Zion, too, and we feel blessed to have you in our midst. Please remember to reach out to those who might feel especially vulnerable during this time, both within and beyond Zion’s doors. To close with a quote from one of the all-time great human beings, Fred Rogers, “Real strength has to do with helping others.” Let’s be strong for and with one another.

Stay healthy and safe, practice vigilant hygiene, and maintain social distancing. With time, patience, and by pulling together, we will get through this.

Peace,
Kristen Burson and Mark Thompson
Church council co-presidents

SERVICE OF THE WORD

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

God of all mercy, and consolation, come to the help of your people, turning us from our sin to live for you alone. Give us the power of your Holy Spirit that we may confess our sin, receive your forgiveness, and grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another. Most merciful God,

We confess that we are captive in sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

THE WORD

First Reading: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Second Reading: Romans 8:6-11

Gospel: John 11:1-45

Sermon "Even Though" - Rev. Jennifer DeWeerth

Surreal. Unprecedented. Like nothing any of us has ever experienced before. That's just some of what we've all been saying as we try to navigate these uncharted waters in our personal lives, families, work and school, churches, and communities, and as our leaders navigate public health, the economy, and the country.

When this started a few weeks ago, I remember feeling so sad for the college seniors at a number of universities, sent home for the semester, told there would be no graduation ceremony in May. I felt sad for my son, a senior in high school who had to cancel his visit to a college and who was almost certainly to miss out on senior year activities like senior ball, class trip and even graduation. I felt badly for all the students whose one and only chance to go to regionals or tournaments or perform the musical or the concert were suddenly gone. There were cancelled vacations and weddings and more. So much lost, so many memories that would never be made. You probably experienced similar thoughts as well. "If only we didn't have to cancel so many events." "If only we could get things back to normal," we thought in those first days.

Now those small griefs seem quaint in comparison to the scale of what is happening around us. And of course, there is that looming sense that things are about to get even worse, with more people falling ill, even dying. It seems like a journey headed only in the wrong direction, toward worse and more dire, with no idea when it will end.

Perhaps you have been on a similar journey the past few weeks, a journey of slowly coming around to the magnitude of what is happening, trying to accept it, without becoming overwhelmed by the loss of so much that is good for full lives--connection and community, worshipping in church, meeting to share a meal or coffee, attending cultural or sporting events, visiting friends and family, greeting colleagues at work, or neighbors at the store.

These days, instead of thinking, “If only we didn’t have to reschedule the church luncheon or the annual fundraiser,” it sounds like this: “If only our leaders hadn’t squandered their energy on denials and avoidance. If only we had started isolation and quarantines at the very beginning. If only we had planned better for a global pandemic. If only. If only. If only. We are feeling desperate to return to the time in our past when this whole thing could have been prevented, contained, or stopped in its tracks, to the time before all of our lives changed so drastically. Our “If onlys” become increasingly desperate, angry, accusatory.

As I read the story of Lazarus this week, it was the “if onlys” that really hit me. Martha runs out to meet Jesus and the first thing she says to him when she sees him is “Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died.” And then Mary, when she is asked to go and see Jesus, kneels at his feet, and says, “Lord if only you had been here, my brother would not have died.” I’m not faulting them. Their brother was dead, and they were grieving. If you’ve ever suffered the loss of a loved one, you probably know the sometimes irrational thoughts that go through your head, sometimes blaming the one who died, “If only he had stopped smoking,” or sometimes the just wishing there had been more time, “If only she had lived to see my wedding.” Martha and Mary’s expressions of grief -- denial, anger, bargaining, sadness, acceptance--these are normal and human, all part of the grieving process. “This can’t be happening. How could you let this happen?” “If only I could turn back time to before this happened.”

When Lazarus dies, his sisters’ world comes crashing down around them. No other family members are mentioned. Perhaps Lazarus is the sisters’ only provider, perhaps the center of their social status. Taking care of his household was their purpose and they loved him. Their pain is almost unimaginable, nearly unbearable, and things will never be the same again.

Like Martha and Mary, we who are living in this current calamity are feeling the loss of normalcy, the fear of the economic toll, the loss of connection. It’s all hitting us at once and we are grieving collectively. “If only!” we scream into the void. “If only you had been there, he never would have died,” says Martha and Mary.

Our Coronavirus “if onlys” may be big ones about life and death, “If only my spouse had not died, I wouldn’t be in this house all alone in this scary time.” or maybe they are small but personally still a loss, “If only there was no virus, I could have gone to my little granddaughter’s birthday party.” It is okay to express our sense of grief and loss this way. I want to ask you to do something, and it can be just for you. You don’t have to share it with anyone. Take a minute right now, and if you have a piece of paper, and write down an “If only” that has been weighing on you in recent days.

The If Onlys are hard on us; they reveal the anger that is part of loss and grief. Sometimes they are even directed at other people, as happens with Lazarus’ grieving sisters. They accuse him, and perhaps rightly so. Why did he wait so long to come? What was more important than being with Lazarus in his time of desperate need, before it was too late? They are angry with Jesus not because they don’t believe in him, but because they do. He has disappointed them, and they are grieving.

Here is what Jesus says in response to the If only’s that Martha and Mary hurl at him: “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, *even though* they die, yet shall they live.” Jesus listens to every last one of their regrets and recriminations, but he is looking ahead not to what could have been but what will be. Even though there is death, life will go on. Even though there is pain and suffering, God heals and saves. Even though he will lose his life, he will gain the world.

Does it feel like too big of a leap from total grief at the loss of Lazarus to a message of new life and resurrection? Maybe at first, but then Mary comes to him and he sees her weeping. And so, after what he says, this is what Jesus does: **he begins to weep**.

And that makes all the difference to the story, because Jesus doesn't deny the human suffering in loss or the powerful experience of grieving, even when he looks for what is beyond it.

When Jesus weeps, he shows us that God's promise of joy doesn't cancel out the grief we experience. Even though he triumphs over death, Jesus shows he understands how hard death is for us. When Jesus cries, he tells us that Martha's and Mary's pain is his own. Through his tears, Jesus calls all of us to a life of empathy and deep spiritual emotion. We have a long tradition as a people of faith for collective lamentation, and also for comforting one another in all kinds of loss. "When you weep, I will weep" is perhaps the deepest truth of friendship and love.

When Jesus weeps, he also honors the poignant mix of joy and sadness that actually marks our lives. Raising Lazarus did not cancel out the pain of his final illness, didn't erase the tears that were shed, and there is no way to forget the heartbreaking loss his sisters experienced when he died.

We believe as the Psalmist says, that "Joy comes in the morning" as it did when Lazarus emerged from the tomb. We believe it will come again when we emerge from this pandemic, but when it does it will come layered on top of loss and grief. We heal, but the scar remains. With tragedy and loss there is always before and after. After tragedy the acute pain may be gone, but it is never the same as before.

After Jesus weeps, he calls Lazarus forth from the tomb, and nothing is ever the same. It turns out that in the Gospel of John, it is this raising of the dead Lazarus that is the catalyst for everything that follows...because the day that he raises Lazarus is the day that the chief priests and the Pharisees *decide to put him to death*. That comes right after the passage we heard today, but it explains where this whole story is going. "What are we going to do?" they ask themselves. "If we let him keep doing this, everyone will believe in him, and not the Emperor, and the Romans will come and destroy us." When Jesus, himself in grief and tears, decides his last big sign will be raising Lazarus, he seals his fate, and all that is left is the road to Jerusalem and the palms, the passion, the death.

All our "If onlys," our regrets and mistakes, and losses and our anger at the injustices of this world, are met by this: Jesus on a cross, the resurrection and the life. Jesus leads us from every "If only" to God's great "Even though," God's life-giving answer to the constraints and conditions that bind us all.

This week, I encourage you to take a minute every day, and write down an "even though" that you experience as life-giving in the midst of so much worry and loss. It could be simple, "Even though I can't leave the house, I had a good talk on the phone with my daughter" Or bigger: "Even though this seems terrifying and hopeless, I believe that God will bring us through."

Perhaps this practice will serve to remind us to trust and to hope, to take courage and find purpose in this difficult time. Perhaps it will remind us that God is faithful, and we can continue in prayer and discipleship even from our isolated homes. Even though "we are struck down we are not destroyed." Even though we live in these mortal human bodies, we are loved by the God of the universe.

Even though we are sometimes selfish and small, we know a God of boundless love.

And there is this one we know by heart, and it might not hurt to say it out loud every so often: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you are with me." Yes, and this promise from Jesus: "Even though they die, yet shall they live." Amen.

Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, and the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Listen to the cries of your people waiting patiently for your healing hand and comforting Spirit especially: those who suffer with chronic pain and all cancer patients, Lydia, Pr. Mary Etta, Paul, Gail, Fran K, Edie Marie, Suzee, Michael Gilleece and family, Claudia T., Diana, Paul Van Allen, that the light of Christ may shine upon them with hope. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

Thanksgiving for the Word

O God of justice and love, we give thanks to you that you illumine our way through life with the words of your Son. Give us the light we need, awaken unto the needs of others, and at the end bring all the world to your feast; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

SENDING AND DISMISSAL

Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever. Amen.

The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Go in peace. Christ is with you. Thanks be to God

APRIL BIRTHDAYS

Your Zion family is wishing you a very Happy Birthday!!

Darlene Hill	2	Lorraine Dowd	10	Diana Goewey	21
Beverly Besler	4	Shawn McLennan	10	Ethan Myers	21
Norm Glista	5	Sarah Myers	11	Doris Hennings	23
William Swartz	6	Sarah Tompkins	11	Daniel Loomis	25
Christine Clark	7	Ann Eadline	17	Alexandria Belmont	28
Fran LaGase	8	Brittany Miller	17	Kaitlynn Belmont	28
Madison Midura	9	Liz Thompson	17	Russell Holzberger	28
Abigail Schiller	9	Mark Thompson	18		

Thank you letters

<p>Many thanks to all who made the Your Neighbors cook-in such a success! 207 meals, 7 lunch cups, and 17 desserts were prepared our homebound friends -Carole Grove</p>	<p>Thank you to everyone who bought gifts, sent gifts, and wrapped gifts, for Ed Nelson & Christina Merritt's baby girl Tracy Ann. We know that the family was truly grateful.</p>
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<p>A sincere and heartfelt thank you to our Zion family for all the love, care and kindness shown at my mom, Klara Kohlbrenner's time of passing. God works through us and in us. His presence was made visible through all of you. With grateful appreciation, Helga and Harry Morrison & family</p>	<p>Dear Zion Lutheran Church family, Thank you for your gift(s) given to your synod, received by ELCA World Hunger in January 2020. Through you, God is calling into existence new hope, and new abundance! In Christ, The Rev Robin Brown/Mission Fund Director</p>
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<p>Dear Zion Lutheran Church, God's boundless grace propels us to share in faith & love. Thank you for your generous gift of \$1,000 to the ELCA for the ministries of ELCA Global Church. To learn more about the impact of your gift, visit elca.org/globalchurch With gratitude, Rahel Mwitula Williams/Global Mission Funding</p>	<p>Thank you to Cheryl Edmiston for seeing a need within the church, and taking the time to research online and order a box of 1,000 plastic bags for Your Neighbors! Cheryl quickly responded to a Facebook post where we asked people to save or donate their plastic bags when the plastic bag ban went into effect. That was very nice of you!</p>
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Given to the Glory of God

In Memory of:	To:	Given by:
Oscar Meneses	Your Neighbors	Carl & Judy Schmitt
Randy Richards	Randy Richards Fund	Linda Bennett
Ozzie & Dorothy Meneses	Building Fund	Millie Angevine
In Honor of:	To:	Given by:
Gloria Cifonelli	Building Fund	Don & Wanda Gregory
Laurel McCurdy	World Hunger	Linda Bennett
Barbara Coleman's 90 th Birthday	Building Fund	Roberta Wurster & family

Lutheran World Relief Ingathering

Through him you now have faith in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory for that very reason – so that you would have faith and hope in God. (1 Peter 1:21)

And so it is with hope that women across our synod continue with our Ingathering of kits for Lutheran World Relief. At this time, we have not heard anything to indicate that the LWR truck pick-up scheduled for May 2 is cancelled. It is possible the date may be moved. For now, we will continue to work with a deadline of April 12 for items collection by Zion members. With our church closed we can't drop our items off in the collection boxes at church. If you have collected kit items and still have them at home, please hold on to them and we will figure out a way to get everything gathered as soon as we have information.

Our original goal is to assemble 10 kits of each kind. The kit content information is below.

[Please do not donate any items decorated with a U.S. flag, patriotic or military symbols, or references to the armed forces, including camouflage.]

"With church doors closing across America, it is time for us to demonstrate that church has never been about the building, it's about the people."

