

Saturday, March 14, 2020

A Pastoral Letter from Rev. Jane Sullivan

My precious people – there is an old Yiddish curse, “May you live in interesting times!” So, we kind of get why that’s a curse! As the Covid-19 pandemic works its way to the top of the page of history for these times, it’s all we talk about, all we see on tv. It’s a bit overwhelming.

But it doesn’t have to be! Cancelling church over the next short period will help to “flatten the curve,” slowing down the transmission of the virus so that the health care community can adapt better to serving those who become ill. And we will not be alone, or isolated – some community gatherings will go ahead for now, and people can choose whether to participate in things like darts and cards and so on. It is possible to enjoy these gatherings if we observe heightened cleanliness, as we have been advised by public health agencies.

Is suspending worship a necessary step or an overreaction?

In the United Church’s statement regarding Covid-19, it states: We urge communities of faith to respond to COVID-19 with compassion, prevention, and prayer.

God calls us to care for all with compassionate hearts. If there are people in our community who are vulnerable, they are our concern – Jesus always went the extra mile for the person who needed him most! This is a small act toward caring for our entire community, slowing down transmission. It’s not about you or I getting the virus – it’s about taking away a fertile ground for it to grow.

Some folks have said that because church is voluntary, people who are well can choose whether to go or not. This is true, but we can carry this virus without knowing it, and some people do go to church through a sense of obligation, even if they don’t really want to. So, this gives them a chance to stay home without feeling as though they are letting their sisters and brothers down.

But the church, of course is not closed, because the church is the people! I will be available to people in whatever way they choose, either through telephone, (705-794-7304) or email (revjane@rogers.com) or in person if you wish. I am reasonably healthy, and I am taking my temperature every day. I am also vulnerable, as I have inflammatory respiratory disease, but I’m not worried. I love you all and care for you – and if you do become ill I

can attend to you in person anyway because of the barrier procedures we observe during outbreaks – I've done it before!

It's not the zombie apocalypse, but it's good practice!

Scientists have been predicting a deadly outbreak of global reach for years – if this is it, then we're doing pretty good. But we still need to make sure that we have tried and true policies and practices to put in place whenever these outbreaks occur, so that when the "big one" comes, we will, as a global community, defeat it!

All of these procedures and policies have been lying around for us to follow during flu season, but we have become lackadaisical in implementing them. Now, due to the extreme ease with which this virus travels, we really have to observe them! So, wash hands, sneeze into your elbow, stay home if you feel unwell...all of the things we know well we need to do! And observe social distancing.

But it's good practice for other things as well. It is showing us places where we can improve our ways of doing things together, for example coordinating the Facebook page with other means of sharing news. It will force me to learn how to transmit worship and other resources to our community when we don't meet -which is also a zero-carbon footprint way to do it! But it also allows fewer clergy to serve more communities, which is something the United Church has been exploring for years. It will stretch our creativity and show us new and exciting ways to do things!

It's not just about us

Although the numbers of deaths are not staggering, like the deaths from some outbreaks, it is important that we remember that each number is a person, loved of God, whose loss is keenly felt. And so, we pray for all those who have died, and for their loved ones. We pray for those who are fearful at this time, who perhaps do not have the resources to keep themselves safe – the homeless, the poor especially the working poor who cannot stay home if they are ill, the isolated, and others we can think of. We pray for frontline workers, who also cannot stay home – for the health care community, business owners, social workers, and the policing community, and others we can think of.

Keep Calm and Wash Your Hands!

Apparently, the phrase "do not be afraid" occurs 365 times in the Bible. It is certainly an important part of Jesus' message, when he brings life-changing

challenge to his followers. He shakes up their way of thinking about things, and doing things, to the point where he himself was imperiled, and of course died as though he were a criminal. But right up to the end, he reminds us that we do not need to be afraid, because Jesus promises to be with us. In the "Great Commission" at the end of Matthew, Jesus sends the disciples out to the four corners of the world – into the great unknown! And he says, "and remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

So, in the next day – hopefully by the end of the day – I will have figured out a way to communicate regularly with you through various means – so please stay tuned. And in the meantime, here's a little whimsy put together by Rev. Kerrie Perry: (sung to "If You're Happy and You Know It")

*If you're worried about Corona, wash your hands,
If you're worried about Corona, wash your hands,
If you're worried about the virus and you want to sit beside us
If you're worried about Corona, wash your hands!*

*Make sure you wash them well and really long
Make sure you wash them well and really long
Do the fronts and the backs
Under your nails and in the cracks
Make sure you wash them longer than this song!
If you're coughing and you're sneezing, stay at home,
If you're feverish and you're wheezing, stay at home,
If you're just not feeling well, there's nothing more to tell,
If you're just not feeling well, just stay at home!*

Reverend Jane Sullivan
705-794-7304 or email revjane@rogers.com
Creemore, New Lowell Pastoral Charge
creemorepastoralcharge@rogers.com