**Pastoral Letter #6**

Friends,

Would you like to (virtually) spend Easter in Jerusalem? Register now:

<http://fosna.nationbuilder.com/easter_20?utm_campaign=easter_2020_1_fixed&utm_medium=email&utm_source=fosna>

 And speaking of **virtual worship**… Thanks again to those who have joined in Morning Prayer, Coffee and Conversation, and Evening Prayer – and especially to those who muddled through Palm Sunday Evening Worship with me. In particular, however – a huge shout-out to the Palm Posse! Julie Zuidema, Gail Permenter, Tom Bachhuber, and Geoff Cooper – you really made the day for many folks. Thank you, thank you, thank you. If you would like to join others for worship on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and/or Easter Sunday – all services on WebEx at 7:00 p.m. – or if you just want to see what kind of technical trouble I can get into *this* time – but you need a new “invitation,” please let me know. No need to be an “Apostle.” The one good thing about online worship is that it eliminates geographical boundaries.

As we continue on in this increasingly antsy-making time of isolation and distancing, I am (pastorally) encouraging you to try to find a **healthy balance** between keeping yourself sane and keeping yourself informed. (I realize this means a different ratio of news-watching to not-news-watching for each of you.) Both are important. The World Health Organization recommends watching/reading the news no more than twice a day. (And I don’t think that means 8 hours each time.) The following two articles pertain.

<https://www.marketwatch.com/story/stay-informed-without-overdosing-on-the-news-2020-04-07>

<https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/20/who-offers-tips-for-living-under-coronavirus-quarantine-dont-drink-smoke-or-watch-too-much-news.html>

 While you’re watching not-too-much news, though, I also encourage you to **pay attention** to the things that are slinking around in the darkness behind the Covid19 headliners. Yes, much of this tends to be “political.” But I reiterate (1) that “politics” means “the practice of government or administration” and is what defines our common life together, so that if our religion is to mean anything in the world, we can not – must not – separate the two; and (2) my understanding of the gospel as a Word which requires us as Christians to not only address emergent needs – running food pantries, offering the occasional assistance with rent/utilities/medical expenses, building levees, making face masks (more on that later) – but also addressing the underlying socio-political realities that create or exacerbate these emergencies in the first place. Jesus didn’t “simply” feed 5000 with a few fish and a little bread and leave it there. He railed at the systemic injustices that left people hungry in the first place, and the leadership for their indifference or active repression. So truly, my Jesus-following-strengthening- exhortation is to spend a *little* of your current disrupted-normal time to pick social justice topic that speaks to you, pay attention, learn a little more about it, and figure out what you can do to support the “justice” part and challenge the “injustice” bits. Or at least do the paying attention part. (And this isn’t just my personal bugaboo – the national church has something to say about it too: <https://episcopalchurch.org/posts/ogr/misinformation-disinformation-fake-news-why-do-we-care> )

 You could pay attention to current issues pertaining to voting rights. Of course, meddling with voting is not the exclusive domain of any party – we (Apostles) live in greater Chicagoland for goodness sake, we are certainly well aware of that. But it is the party currently in power that generally has more control and influence over the rules and regulations, and today (Tuesday 07 April) our neighbors in Wisconsin are having to choose between voting and self-isolating because the party currently in power has made it so. You are absolutely entitled to vote for whom you choose – but all eligible voters should have an opportunity to do so too, and unfortunately that is not happening. I know some of you read historian Heather Cox Richardson’s daily “Letters from an American” but if you don’t, here are two articles on current voter rights actions you might find informative.

(Letter of 04 April):

<https://mail.yahoo.com/d/folders/1/messages/ABwHB-MpWygvXomOCwjCMLm7fwA?guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly9sb2dpbnByb2R4LmF0dC5uZXQvRklNL3Nwcy9BVFRpZHAvc2FtbDIwL2xvZ2luaW5pdGlhbD9SZXF1ZXN0QmluZGluZz1IVFRQUG9zdCZQYXJ0bmVySWQ9aHR0cHMlM0ElMkYlMkZsb2dpbi55YWhvby5jb20lMkZzYW1sJTJGMi4wJTJGYXR0Ji5sYW5nPWVuLVVTJlRhcmdldD1odHRwcyUzQSUyRiUyRm1haWwueWFob28uY29tJTJGZA&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAGHOsNDdXDTkWI1l3k6-yhN3QOA0OoQ7bTuJkAGUYif0LAvvlkqSqat1dJhrwDczzQq_W_ozpjmj4UCuCRUCl0qtxdeGkAu_en63bH59JIF3O29Ogi_qUwspWKXY9ruD_AUgG5W8n4zBkEFOImGhb_KRabmV29XpS02l4TZOXU0i>

(Letter of 06 April):

<https://mail.yahoo.com/d/folders/1/messages/AF-52dc52CVnXow1Zg3TEGwsIBk?guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly9sb2dpbnByb2R4LmF0dC5uZXQvRklNL3Nwcy9BVFRpZHAvc2FtbDIwL2xvZ2luaW5pdGlhbD9SZXF1ZXN0QmluZGluZz1IVFRQUG9zdCZQYXJ0bmVySWQ9aHR0cHMlM0ElMkYlMkZsb2dpbi55YWhvby5jb20lMkZzYW1sJTJGMi4wJTJGYXR0Ji5sYW5nPWVuLVVTJlRhcmdldD1odHRwcyUzQSUyRiUyRm1haWwueWFob28uY29tJTJGZA&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAGHOsNDdXDTkWI1l3k6-yhN3QOA0OoQ7bTuJkAGUYif0LAvvlkqSqat1dJhrwDczzQq_W_ozpjmj4UCuCRUCl0qtxdeGkAu_en63bH59JIF3O29Ogi_qUwspWKXY9ruD_AUgG5W8n4zBkEFOImGhb_KRabmV29XpS02l4TZOXU0i>

 Or you could pay attention to the fact that – while many utilities, service providers, and commercial enterprises are responding to the current unemployment crisis by eliminating, reducing, or deferring payments, many public water providers are not among them.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/apr/06/millions-us-at-risk-losing-running-water-amid-layoffs-triggered-coronavirus-pandemic>

 Or you could pay attention to the impact the coronavirus is having on the incarcerated or those on home arrest.

<https://www.injusticewatch.org/news/2020/coronavirus-electronic-monitoring/>

 You get the point. Pay attention to what the Spirit moves you to be moved by, but remember that Christian conviction and praxis at any time, in any place, under any circumstances, require, as our Presiding Bishop puts it, that we turn, learn, pray, worship, bless, and go – take action. Then rest.

 Of course, I encourage you to pay attention not only to the things that “slink,” but the things that “dance.” There are plenty of **good things going on** out there, too.

School superintendents making sure their free-and reduced-price lunch students get their meals no matter what.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/06/in-the-poorest-county-in-americas-poorest-state-a-virus-hits-home-hunger-is-rampant>

People making masks (and yes, those cloth masks *are* better than nothing, and you *should* be wearing one when you’re outside).

<https://www.marketwatch.com/story/some-fabrics-are-more-effective-than-others-for-making-diy-face-masks-heres-which-ones-are-best-2020-04-07>

People sharing short supplies (this from 25 March, when toilet paper and bottled water pretty much didn’t exist in stores, but there are certainly more current examples).

<https://www.fox10phoenix.com/news/fedex-worker-shares-thoughtful-care-package-left-for-delivery-drivers>

Street artists transforming bare and crumbling walls into larger-than-life “thank-yous” for coronavirus heroes, “sung” or unsung.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-swiss-graffiti/swiss-street-artist-pays-tribute-to-unsung-coronavirus-heroes-idUSKBN21O2MN>

The original Broadway cast of Hamilton reuniting (virtually) for one 9-year-old girl.

<https://www.npr.org/2020/04/06/828088183/hamilton-cast-reunites-for-emily-blunt-john-krasinski-and-one-lucky-9-year-old>

 You get the point. Remember that Christian conviction and praxis at any time, in any place, under any circumstances, require, as our Presiding Bishop puts it, that we turn, learn, pray, worship, bless - delight in God’s abundance, mercy, grace, and love as shown through God’s people then share it with others – and go. Then rest.

 And finally – have you really made it this far? Merciful Heavens – here are some **Holy Week “churchy” things** offered for your peace and pleasure.

Ecumenical Council resources:

<https://episcopalchurch.org/posts/publicaffairs/ecumenical-coalition-offers-invitation-and-resources-holy-week-and-easter-during>

Bishop Lee’s thoughts on a Courageous Holy Week:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mtri6gU0nMY&feature=youtu.be>

Some general resources and information on the church’s various responses to the pandemic:

<https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/tag/coronavirus/>

<https://episcopalchurch.org/>

And some words from the *Sojourners* archives that might help guide us through this unusual Holy Week.
**"We forget where we were three days earlier."** At times of national crises, we fixate on power, writes Jim Stenzel in ["Good Friday is Part of Holy Week, Too"](https://sojo.net/magazine/march-1978/good-friday-part-holy-week-too) (March 1978), focusing on what's necessary "for keeping the economy on an even keel" or "for the integrity and stability of the empire" and forgetting the spiritual consequences.
**Holy Saturday.** Poet Holly Wells describes the day between Good Friday and Easter Sunday as an uncertain, shadowy twilight of [longing, love, and pain."](https://sojo.net/magazine/april-2020/dryad-gethsemane-speaks-mary-magdalene-evening-holy-saturday) (April 2020).
**"Easter is sometimes hard to find."** *Sojourners* editor Rose Marie Berger writes about spending Easter in El Salvador at a memorial to the 900 victims of a massacre. "There was nothing, I was convinced, of resurrection in this place," she writes in ["A Peculiar Hope"](https://sojo.net/magazine/april-2008/peculiar-hope) (April 2008). "It was 100 percent Good Friday crucifixion, unmerited suffering brought on by the sins of the world." Yet as Berger writes, sometimes "Easter finds us."
**"Afraid and yet filled with joy."** Matthew 28:8 says that after hearing of Jesus' resurrection, the women who had visited Jesus' tomb were both "afraid and yet filled with joy." We often focus on the "joy," but what about the fear? "Through the centuries women of faith have experienced the combination of fear and joy as they have seen the resurrection as applicable to their own claim to newness of life," writes Leontine Kelly in ["Daring to Believe"](https://sojo.net/magazine/april-1987/daring-believe) (April 1987).
**Our physical bodies.** "Many Christians today do not seem to believe in bodily resurrection," writes Reta Halteman Finger ("[Resurrection Isn't Just Spiritual](https://sojo.net/magazine/april-2020/resurrection-isn-t-just-spiritual)," April 2020). But the resurrection stories are full of food, fleshy scars, and warm embraces. "Our Creator God must highly value our physical bodies of all shapes, colors, and genders," writes Finger.
**Out of the abyss.** Walter Brueggemann writes of a "crisis" posed by Easter in "Going Public with God's Good News" (April 2011): "the new life to which we are called, one of generous hospitality, is not like the old life we have lost." Though "filled with joy and shaped like forgiveness," it demands our "resolve and fidelity."
**Mary Magdalene.** If you need something nontraditional, think about Holy Week through the perspective of this often-overlooked disciple. Read [Chris Karnadi's review of *Magdalene*](https://sojo.net/magazine/may-2020/mary-magdalene-inspires-feminist-electronica) (April 2020) and then listen to FKA Twigs reimagine the titular character in her recent album of sparse electronica.

Thank you once more for being who you are and doing what you do. I’ll leave you with a bit of a Wes King song, true with words that pertain to you all: You are the salt of the earth. Heaven came down for your worth.
Angels rejoiced at your birth – ‘cause you are the salt of the earth.

Godspeed,

(Mother) Martha