

Pastoral Letter, April 23, 2020. -- The power of prayer.

Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Easter Season unfolds in 'churchland' we find ourselves in much the same condition as we were in on Easter Sunday. Spring continues to ease its way into the earth, the flowers and trees steadily and persistently but to be honest, a little *too* slowly for our liking. As I have said we do not worship nature we worship the God whose creation this is. And one of the ways God blesses us is with the reassuring knowledge that Spring *will* come. That is doubly reassuring for us this year in the light of this other uncertainty which we keep getting mixed messages about.

We will get through this but when and how. There is no God-given celestial timetable for this to happen. And what is alternately reassuring and unsettling is that we are told we do have some control over when and how this will be over . We have no say over *whether* Spring will come or *when* but with the Covid-19 virus it seems we do. The challenge is to get it right. As Christians we have resources to assist us to live with the uncertainty and the risks involved.

The first thing that comes to mind is prayer. And prayer works in several ways. One is to leverage the outcome. This is the big one and the one that most thinking people will question. It is a faith statement to believe prayer will ultimately make any difference as to how this pandemic plays out. It is not magic as if by uttering some incantation we can *presto!* make it all go away. But the power of prayer is something I have seen in action time and time again. I offer no proof beyond my own conviction based on years of experience and the promise of scripture. Once when the disciples could not 'heal' a boy suffering from what appears to be epilepsy by their normal means of prayer with the laying on of hands and anointing Jesus said, "There is no way to deal with this except through prayer."

Three Easters ago Elizabeth and I were relaxing after the Good Friday service when we got a call from our daughter that her daughter, our granddaughter was in Sunnybrook and it was uncertain she would survive. We waited until we were allowed to go and see her. We immediately called out our prayer warriors. We wondered if we should go to church on Easter Day but still unable to visit we decided to go. And once again we were surrounded by prayer. Finally, Easter afternoon we were allowed to visit. By that time our granddaughter was recovering. And we learned more details of the reason she was in hospital.

She had attempted to commit suicide. And if it had not been for the quick action of her friends she would have succeeded. We subsequently learned this was her third attempt and in each case her friends got her to the hospital in time. We were relieved she was in recovery and we had our chance to visit and talk with

her but as a family we were all holding our breath as to what treatment she might receive. We were sure she would be required to stay for a mandated period in the psychiatric ward. But the supervising psychiatrist decided to release her. We thought *he* was crazy!

Part of our granddaughter's struggle was that she had dropped out of school and had not been able to find a job. But within a week of her discharge from hospital she had two interviews one of which resulted in her finally getting work. That job eventually led to an assistant manager's position in that firm. And so when I take you back to the Good Friday afternoon when it was touch and go as to whether she would survive and through that Easter week-end and the following days she was in hospital I can assure you the only thing that sustained us was prayer, the prayers of our friends and our own prayers.

I have said prayer works to change outcomes. But just as importantly the prayers of our friends sustain us as we move through difficult times. And finally, prayer enables us to reach out to God in our distress. The most difficult thing we experience is when all our prayers, especially our prayers for a good outcome appear to go unanswered. And yet in one way or another we find our way through prayer whether it is our own prayer or whether it is the praying community around us. As I say it is not magic. But it does work. It allows us to face even the most difficult times with hope.

Other resources we have include our coming together in fellowship prayer and praise through worship. That is what we are now working on as a community to find the way that will sustain us while we are prevented from gathering physically. We are feeling confident enough now in our ability to do this I think it is time to expand our opportunities for fellowship. And so I am proposing we gather each Wednesday morning at 11 via Zoom for fellowship, prayer and reflection. This is not another service but something more open ended designed to allow us to share and support one another through the times we are still restricted to our homes. On Sunday at worship you will be given an opportunity to express your support and ask your questions. It will be open to any and all who want to come including friends who may not be members of the Evangelists. Not everyone will feel the need for this and that is fine. But one of the most powerful resources we have for finding our way through this time of stress and uncertainty is the fellowship of other believers.

I have also been asked to set up 'office hours, times when you can reach me as individuals. We can do this by phone, by Facebook Messenger, by Skype or by Zoom. I haven't worked out the details for this but should have something in place within the next week. In the meantime I am available by e-mail bishoppatrick@outlook.com and by phone and text at 647 269 8897. Please do not hesitate to contact me for whatever reason.

One final resource is scripture- by simply reading the Bible regularly, by sharing reflections as we will on my proposed Wednesday gatherings, by more sustained and intentional study and through the more formal reflections I offer on Sundays through the sermons. Scriptures are especially important in a time when we are unable to share the fulness of word and sacrament each Sunday in the worship space we call church.

I look forward to seeing and/or hearing from you all on Sunday.

Say safe. (Stay home!) And keep the faith.

With every blessing,

+Patrick

Interim Priest in Charge