

Church of the Evangelists Pastoral May 2, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

Looking back over what I have written below I have tried to come up with a title for it. One of the things I have discovered about writing is that it not only helps to put my thoughts on paper but it helps uncover what my thoughts really are. It can be an exercise in discovery. When I began this pastoral letter I had no idea where it would ultimately take me. I have also broken the letter up with sub-titles to reduce the feeling of being flooded with text. And so, here is my title

Worship: Life in the Ark

- The Flood

I hope this finds you well. We are overwhelmed by a flood of statistics, talks of peaks and plateaus, tentative speculations as to timing of loosening restrictions and on, and on. As we say, “too much information”. All of this comes sharply into focus as the threat comes close to home. It is not always the Covid-19 disease itself. It can be surgeries and treatments deferred. It can be the threat of a job loss. And of course, there is the hypervigilance we must all continue to exercise not even knowing where we might inadvertently come into contact with the virus.

It goes deeper as we are made aware of the reports of increased domestic violence and the ‘cover’ the isolation provides for child molesters. The laws governing these behaviours have not changed. But the capacity to provide alternative safe harbours is compromised.

I participated in an online meeting yesterday in which participant after participant expressed their sense of privilege in being in some ways buffered against the worst outcomes of the pandemic. This, despite the fact, that in one case the person had lost her job of twenty-seven years, and in another, both the spouse and an adult child had near misses from the virus itself. The depth of the effects of this crisis creates this odd and surprising experience of privilege despite significant loss and vulnerability.

All the participants in that meeting are faith-based folk. They are not religious leaders but board members of a mental health clinic. And one of the

opportunities that comes with their privilege is to reach out to those who know no privilege, who right now, only know crushing loss.

All this can 'get to us' unless we adopt some strategies to widen our view of life in all its fulness. It is understandable that we just need to escape and divert our attention from the elephant in the room- the elephant who is *threatening* to break into our room. Escaping this threat drives us to want to stay in touch with friends and family on the one hand and on the other we feel the need to shut ourselves off from that wider network of contacts and sources of information we rely on to keep us informed whether that is news outlets or social media.

- The Ark

One of the outlets we have is worship. It brings us into the context of a world-view that includes a God who is big enough who has plumbed the depths of human suffering and who gives us hope in the face of the worst we can experience.

This is not theoretical in the sense of a highly intellectual system worked out by clever people. It is based on a history of engagement between the creator and the people called into relationship with that creator. It comes into focus in and through the history of one individual, Jesus of Nazareth. Here in this one man the God who is the *author* of all life, the *source* of all life and who is *above* all life intersects in the most costly way with this creation. God who is above all gender, the source of all gender and the author of all gender immerses him/herself- in the creation and knows it not as an observer 'watching us from a distance' but as a participant knowing it and experiencing it from the inside out.

And so, when we come to God and seek God's consolations we come to one who is in solidarity with our anguish. But we also come to one in whose company we find that hope which lifts us above the flood of immediate circumstance. And one of the things we share with our God is the capacity to design means within the creation to allow us to navigate the flood that threatens to carry away life as we have known it. Think of ourselves now as members of a church and a nation along with other nations world-wide building the arks together that will allow us to survive the flood and emerge into a world needing to be rebuilt.

- A Twig Called Hope

In all this, some things will be lost that we will grieve. And some things will be lost that should be lost. Pray we will gain in wisdom and build better next time. Some things will emerge and are already emerging to let us do things better.

Worship lifts us to the surface of the flood and gives us a look into that wider sky that speaks of limitless possibilities for the future- call that lift hope.

God keep you high and dry,

+Patrick

Interim Priest in Charge