



Beverly Heights
Presbyterian
Church

scattered seeds.

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

May 2020



my **Corona**

We asked a dozen folks from our congregation to give us their takes on the coronavirus.

What has it meant to them?

How has it altered their lives?

What have they learned from it?

Thinking Covidly

by Pastor Nate Devlin

Our congregation has not gathered for corporate worship since March 8th. Since that time, we have been monitoring the ever evolving Covid-19 situation, trying to adapt to the many ministry changes the virus has demanded of us.

Change is not always easy, especially when you have well established patterns for your work and familiar rhythms for your day, particularly the Lord's Day. But changes were needed and that is why early on, I shared with the staff the necessity for us to adopt what I called "Covid thinking."

By this, I meant that we needed to start reimagining what was possible for ministry based upon what was permissible by federal, state and local officials. In doing so, we've tried our best to maintain ministry standards while adjusting to new realities.

Now that several weeks have passed, I'm also reflecting on what I have learned through this unprecedented experience. Here's what I've discovered.

First, I have come to appreciate in a new way that good leadership requires wise adjustments. When faced with challenges, finding solutions sometimes means making slight adjustments, but other times it requires reinventing the wheel.

Adjusting wisely means being able to pivot. If you can't pivot, if you can't adjust, if you can't think creatively, then you get stuck and fall behind. While I prefer the stability of predictable rhythms, I can't afford to be overly rigid. Otherwise, I'll crack. I'm not one to give up on the standards (as you'll see in my second point), but I've learned that sometimes you need to bend and not break. Keeping a stance that can pivot allows me, in the words of my pastoral mentor Rick Wolling, "to keep my eye on the ball."

Second, I've learned that in times of crisis, you cannot always assume that everyone holds to a common definition of what is essential. What is essential for one party may not be so in the eyes of another. I've been rather saddened, as I'm sure you have, as to what federal, state and local authorities define as "life-sustaining."

In some states, abortion clinics remain open because they are deemed essential while cancer patients cannot receive chemotherapy. Not everyone defines "essential" the same, so I've learned that you must advocate for what you believe is essential and, as a Christian, to advocate for what God has defined as essential.

Mercifully, Pennsylvania has defined the church as life-sustaining, and so I've been permitted to come

into the office every week. Our staff has continued to work and provide ministry to the congregation.

Today, in the public domain, where there is a sea of competing definitions of "essential," we need now more than ever a definition *from above*. We require biblical insight into what God defines as essential. I have come to see more clearly the necessity for courageous leaders who will advocate compassionately yet firmly for those biblically defined essentials.

Finally, I have had my strong suspicion affirmed that the local life is a well-adjusted life and that proximity matters.

What do I mean by this? While all of our lives have been affected by Covid-19, I have observed that, in the grand scheme of things, my life has been mildly affected. Why? Because most of my life is lived out, day by day, week by week, year by year, at the local level. When a life gets spread out over great distances over great lengths of time, the supply chain becomes longer and also more vulnerable.

My supply chain is rather short. All of my life-giving relationships and experiences are located in our community, at our church and in my home. I know that a local life runs the risk of becoming too provincial; care must be taken to guard against that from happening. But a local life is a strong one, especially in times of great trial.

Proximity also matters, not only in goods and services but in relationships. Zoom and live-streaming have been wonderful tools in these days of self-quarantine, but they are no substitute for the human face and flesh. Proximity matters, which is why the doctrine of God's omnipresence is so important.

God is everywhere, not so that he can keep tabs on our behavior, but because a life-giving, healthy relationship with Him requires it. God must be near to us so that we can love Him. And so, He comes to us, by His Son and through His Spirit. Thank God that He has. As I have learned all too well, one should never take for granted the tremendous power of the church gathered, in the flesh, on the Lord's Day.

I long to be with you all again soon!



Longing for Jesus’ face & yours

by Lisa Tyger

If, in the end, you have not chosen Jesus Christ, it will not matter what you chose.

This message hangs in our living room, reminding us of our most important choice.

Daily, this pandemic offers new opportunity for worry and fear. Are my loved ones safe? Am I? How will Scott’s business fare long term in this broken economy? Should Hannah sign a lease for grad school or will she be doing classes online? Where will Isaac be taking classes?

The worries multiply faster than the virus itself until I remember the verse from Deuteronomy 31:8: “The Lord is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you, He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.”

Daily, I must choose life over death, as it also says in Deuteronomy. Courage over cowering. Faith over fear. Joy over despair. Productivity over apathy. Activity over lethargy. And perhaps most challenging, salad over pizza.

While these are not new choices during Covid-19, they require a greater measure of discipline and deliberateness. Since I’ve already made the only choice that matters, until the end, I need to occupy myself with the things that matter to Him.

Incidentally, I am struck with how busy we are during Covid-19.

For a number of years, simplifying has been a buzzword. Pare down children’s activities, seek flexible work schedules, get back to “the good ol’ days.” When the country shut down, I naively thought the pace of life would slow down. But people are BUSY!

In fact, I’m busier than ever, and many folks I encounter say the same. I’m still pondering what this says about us, but it seems to me if it isn’t happening now, the “simpler times” many say they long for are long gone.

Speaking of longing ...

Many times, I’ve missed someone or something, but in the last 39 days, I’ve learned the meaning of longing. I constantly think of returning to worship and fellowship at Beverly Heights. I’m envisioning new ways for us to gather, recognizing it will be a season of transition with varying comfort levels. Family pictures on Sunday morning and videos of kiddos on Facebook make me



cry. But this week in particular, I’ve recognized just how deep my desire is to worship with you and see your faces. To talk with you, laugh with you ... and someday, to hug you again!!

When Evangeline Tan’s face unexpectedly popped into our Zoom staff meeting Wednesday, I raised my hand to wave but instead clapped it over my mouth to stifle the sob. Lucy Parrish’s voice on the phone as I talked to Katie made me sigh.

Seeing Don Dukelow, Diane Owens and Linda Hogg during a quick “sidewalk” visit had me choking back tears.

I take comfort in knowing we’ll be back together soon.

And even as I’m encouraged by that knowledge, I take greater joy in the certainty that the longing for a home I’ve never seen and a Savior who laid his life down for mine will one day cease in a place and time where loneliness, fear and Covid-19 have been irrevocably defeated and we’ll all be together forever with our King.

Seeking pandemic-sized peace

by Elissa Winkler

“Will you pray that I don’t worry?” my 9-year-old asked the other night. “I can’t stop thinking there might be something scary in my closet.”

“Of course, kiddo.”

“Mom, do you ever get worried or think about scary things?” Oh, if Hudson only knew.

There’s a movie reel of what-ifs and worst-case scenarios that run constantly through my mind. I call it my “anxiety monster.” Usually I succeed in muting it through techniques that create stability and calm for me: routine and order, exercise and alone time (I’m a classic introvert).

Yet manufactured peace doesn’t work so well when life knocks you to your knees like a tsunami-sized wave. I’ve been knocked to my knees before, and I’ve learned in times of great trial to rely on God’s strength. My favorite sins have muscle memory. Mine is a posture of pride, fear and control: hands comfortably clenched.

Recently the “anxiety monster” began to grow like my grocery stockpile. Four family-sized bags of chips and 37 apples in our home, my kids’ go-to snacks.

Cannot run out! Check the toilet paper!

Then the change in routine and a badly sprained ankle. I can’t even leave to go on a walk! News articles, death rates and the unknown as my monster grew in size and stature.

What if my sister with the auto-immune disease gets the coronavirus? A pay cut: will we be okay? I could feel a wave of anxiety washing over me.

Time to change posture.

While reading Psalm 118 during Lent, I was drawn to verses 2 – 4: “Let Israel now say: ‘His love endures forever.’ Let the house of Aaron now say: ‘His love endures forever.’ Let those who fear the Lord now say: ‘His love endures forever.’”

In his commentary, Puritan Richard Capel stresses the word *now*: “Beware of delaying ... our hearts will cool, and our affections will fall down ... it is *now* or never, today or not at all; Satan hath little hope to prevail unless he can persuade us to omit our duties when the clock strikes, and therefore his skill is to urge us to put it off till another time as fitter or better.” I knew my perspective needed to change. To live is Christ, to die is gain. There is no better time than now to praise the Lord. But it’s hard to praise with clenched hands in fists.



Isaiah 26:3 says: “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.”

I shared with Hudson: “You know what I think of when I read that verse? I think of your and your sister’s hands when you released the butterflies the other day. Open, and lifted up. I can’t hold on to all of that worry and fear when I’m praising God and asking the Holy Spirit for peace.”

Charles Spurgeon, the famed British preacher, says: “I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages.”

Lord, may I remember when the waves of life knock me to my knees, to open my hands in a posture of praise and hold them aloft to receive Your perfect peace, for You are the Prince of Peace.

Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to the cross I cling. Rock of Ages, cleft for me; let me hide myself in Thee.

Now batting for Team Jesus

by Andy Lucas

“Who knows whether you have been called for such a time as this?”

Such was the exhortation and encouragement offered by Elder Bob Thomson as I prepared to deliver my first Easter sermon.

A week before, one of my neighbors said she would organize a neighborhood Easter morning service. She asked me to give the message. For years I had been praying for a chance to share my faith with my neighbors in more overt ways. Most of my neighbors are either culturally Catholic or CEO’s (Christmas and Easter Only) when it comes to their faith.

I’m never quiet about my relationship with Jesus, but this was going to be something different entirely. Be careful what you pray for, indeed! God’s sovereignty shows itself in the weirdest places.

I felt the full weight of this opportunity as I considered what the Spirit wanted me to say about the need for Christ’s sacrifice and the true joy that Easter brings when you know “the rest of the story.” I had lots of opportunities to practice leaning on the Father and trusting Him for the outcome as I prepared.

Easter morning came and Amy still made a fancy breakfast, we still got dressed up for church, and we still yelled at the kids when they wouldn’t smile for family pictures. It felt a little anticlimactic and sad to have to sit down on the couch for



the service. However, Nate’s sermon was an incredible reminder that even Covid is a tool to execute God’s purposes.

After our official service, it was time for round two.

Seven families joined us for songs, a reading and the message. I used a baseball analogy in my sermon. I shared the despair I felt in Game 7 of the 2016 World Series, when it looked like the Cubs might lose but, after an excruciating rain delay, ended up winning their first championship in over a century, to illustrate the glory of Easter morning.

I was glad there was some distance between us so my neighbors couldn’t see my hands shaking. I was about as nervous as I’d been during Game 7. While there was no rush to the altar afterward, the Gospel was proclaimed in very clear terms and I praise God for that!

As I reflected on the experience afterward with one of my Christian neighbors, we realized that if Covid had hit even two years earlier, the service wouldn’t have worked. We wouldn’t have built strong enough relationships with our neighbors to be able to ask them to even attend this service.

Ours is a tight-knit neighborhood and this quarantine has brought us even closer together. Certainly, I would have preferred to be with my Beverly Heights family on Easter morning. For me, there is no time sweeter than Sunday mornings, and I ache for the day when we will gather together again.

However, God calls us to scatter more often than He calls us to gather. This experience taught me that all I have to do is be ready to pick up the bat; the Spirit will tell me when and where to swing.

Until then, I’ll be waiting for my next plate appearance, and I encourage you to do the same. After all, God’s sovereignty shows itself in the weirdest places.

NYC is bent but not broken

by Ben Cramer

NEW YORK, N.Y. – I’ve been spending a lot of time in the Big Apple lately to be with my brother who was recently diagnosed with cancer.

While here in April, I had some downtime in which to walk the streets of Manhattan and observe the devastating impact that Covid-19 has had.

In a city as brimming with life as New York normally is, it is very rare that the impact of any one event is so substantial it demands the attention and coordinated efforts of everyone at once. But Covid-19, so far claiming the lives of more than 18,000 city residents, is that very rare moment. Already, about six times as many people have died as in the city’s other memorable cataclysm on 9/11.

Amid this latest tragedy, New Yorkers are demonstrating a strong sense of care for each other which is, ironically, best expressed through social distancing, something difficult to do in a city this densely populated.

On a normal day in New York City, there isn’t enough space to walk on the sidewalks without having to dodge another person. Subway platforms are so packed you can’t board a train without physically bumping into three or four strangers. Bicyclists and cars dart across streets. The sounds of car horns and sirens is omnipresent.

New York is a different city today. The

most obvious thing to see these days is what isn’t there: the people. It is quiet. The roads are largely empty, and there’s almost no one on the sidewalks except those with high-energy kids blowing off steam or people walking their dogs.

One day, after dropping off my brother Andy for surgery at the hospital in midtown Manhattan to install his chemotherapy port – I couldn’t accompany him inside due to the virus – I walked around for four hours. I observed people standing in the middle of a six-lane avenue taking a selfie without the slightest fear of getting run down. I visited a largely vacant Central Park while praying for God’s mercy in Andy’s life.

Then I was texted to get him. Because I had my car with me and I knew Andy could use the distraction, we went sightseeing in Times Square. There were no soap-box preachers, no street buskers, no photo ops with superheroes, no hustle or bustle. It was silent. The next morning Andy wanted to go a little



That’s when the silence that seemed to be smothering the city was broken as people in their buildings erupted with shouting through open windows, banging on pots, whistling and clapping in appreciation for the first responders.

I looked forward to this time each day as I realized that it was far more than simply a sign of appreciation. This daily ritual was a cry of defiance, that most New Yorkers were alive and well, grateful for the sacrifices being made on their behalf – and ready to return to their community soon.

farther to a favorite summertime destination of his, Coney Island.

The drive took only 30 minutes on the empty streets, bridges, tunnels and highways. Coney Island is now a landscape of shuttered businesses and a vacant, windswept boardwalk. It’s a pedestrian super highway, as wide as Route 19, empty and lifeless.

One highlight came each day at 7 p.m.

God is in control, even IF

by Louise O. Boyle

Tom and I were about to embark on a mission trip to Uganda when news of the coronavirus first hit. I wondered if Rick Wolling would be able to go to Thailand. Then, with the congregation, I prayed that he would get back home! He did. God was in control.

I assumed our trip would be cancelled, but it wasn't. As I readied myself for travel, I mentioned to Karen Sourbeer, my boss, that even IF I got home in two weeks, there may be a 14-day quarantine required.

"God forbid," was her reaction. "God is in control," was my answer.

After being in Uganda for one week, President Trump announced his plans for closing down travel from Europe. With our flight going through Brussels, I worried about getting waylaid in Uganda for an extended period. After one night of worry, God, Tom and Jill reminded me that God was in control. I gave it over to God and my heart was at peace.

Incredibly, we got home one day before the airports in Europe were closed to travel to the U.S. We arrived home days after the crazy six-hour lines at Dulles airport – it took us 20 minutes to be cleared by medical personnel. The roads were empty – no rush hour at 6 p.m. in Washington, D.C. Surely it felt that God was in control.

Now, it is almost six weeks later. We have

done much of what we were asked to do. Stayed away from loved ones. Stayed away from work. Stayed away from friends. I have to tell you, I just know that God is in control.

But my doubts are increasing lately as I see my concern shift from Covid-19 to the economy. I have to turn away from the news. I have to ask my husband – full of LOTS of information about the situation (you have NO idea how much he leaves out of his O'Bservations report) – to change the subject. I can't think about it. I feel the fear rising up in my chest. And, I wonder, IS GOD IN CONTROL?

Will people everywhere have enough money to buy food? Will we ever be able to recover financially as a country? Will my children lose their livelihood? Will we ever eat at a restaurant again or go to a swimming pool? Is this the new normal? Will we repeat this shutdown scenario



each flu season? Will terrorists learn from this disaster?

I read Psalm 91:1-6. I have done this each morning since mid-way through our Uganda trip.

"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty, I will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust. For he will deliver you from the snare of the Fowler And from the deadly pestilence.

He will cover you with his pinions, And under his wings you will find refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and buckler. You will not fear the terror of the night, Nor the arrow that flies by day, Nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, Nor the destruction that wastes at noonday."

Because – yes, God is in control. This is not His first plague. He knows what He will do. Yes, even IF ...

Learning to say: thy will

by Laurita Kuzko

This situation we've all been enduring has been a source of fear for many. There are positives.

I like knowing everyone is washing their hands. I don't mind the masks, either. In Japan, it is customary for anyone who may be sick and contagious to wear a mask, out of common courtesy. I think it's not a bad way to behave. Others orientated.

It is amazing how surprised I still get when life turns down a road I was not expecting and would never choose for myself. But as Christians, we are called into a life changing relationship with our God. He changes us from people who have been living our lives as we thought best, into children, who no longer direct our own paths. His ways are not our ways, and His thought are not our thoughts. His way is a cross.

This road becomes narrower. Things are not business as usual. Quarantined, with no church gathering, working from home, homeschooling, and no social outings is all very restricting. We don't like being restricted.

We want the green pastures beside the still waters. "Could I just sit still a while here Jesus?" I ask. "Does this road have to turn down another dark and narrow way?"

How else can God straighten my paths? I've wandered down wrong ways so readily, and so boldly, that He has had to put roadblocks and boulders in my way.



As Kate so perfectly puts it: It's at once exciting and terrifying.

God has given me many blessings disguised as bends in the road. One is my broken back. At a young age I learned about physical restrictions. But it has kept me from following my own selfish paths. I can't get too far ahead of God if I can only walk short distances.

Another gift I have been given is chronic pain. It is restricting. It limits your energy, and sometimes your ability to concentrate. But He is making us into a new creation. It takes multiple hot firings to make clay into a vessel of honor.

I also have a compromised immune system. Another big turn in the road with

a whole new set of restrictions. For me, every interaction comes with a risk of catching something. So, I can choose to live, or I can choose to remain in isolation, and fear.

That's a thought process that most people are just now learning, and something we all will need to address moving forward. It always costs

something to reach out to others. We count the cost, and I do believe the price has gone up.

This fiery trial is changing us from perspectives and standards we learned growing up to His perspective. We are invited to live with new motives, new purposes, with a new source of life.

We are called to grow to maturity, into the image of God's firstborn, King Jesus. This is an opportunity to learn to love others, look beyond our lives, our plans, our fears, and see the people that the Lord has put into our pathways. We can choose to yield, and be changed to be more like Jesus. We can learn to say, not my will, but thine.

Saving memories through the gift of time

by Bill Mehaffey

It took a quarantine for me to discover a new calling as an archivist of sorts.

Over the past six weeks, I've scanned more than 5,000 images of photos that formerly sat in a large cabinet in our basement. I'd passed that cabinet many times, with good intentions, but never quite found the time to tackle the task in earnest. I'd shut it and walk away.

It held precious memories of events and milestones, as well as photos of children and grandchildren, reminding me of the joys of family. But what to do with these?

Several years ago, in an attempt to preserve these treasured images, I began organizing them for possible future use. The stay-at-home order – strictly enforced by my daughter Erin Rimmel, who lives nearby – gave me ample time to scan for hours. Scanning is boring and repetitive but, in the end, it yields pleasure from the memories they evoke.

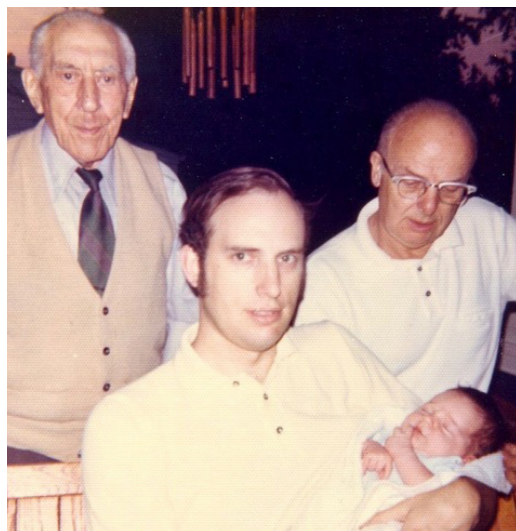
Some of the photos were loose; some were in albums. Now, they've been captured digitally in the Apple Photos program, searchable and retrievable through the miracle of facial recognition software. Search the name "Tom O'Boyle," for instance, and instantly several photos of Tom and Louise appear from my retirement party years ago (a handsome couple then and now, I might add).

Opening up that cabinet has been like climbing through a window on another

time. There were shots of my grandfather William Mehaffey, who was born in 1873 in County Down in Northern Ireland. He emigrated to the United States and became a U.S. citizen on April 10, 1895. Joann and I once visited County Down and found the gravesites of his parents, my great grandparents.

There were pictures of my parents William and Dorothy on their wedding day: June 6, 1934. Of my dog "Cookie" when I was a boy when my family lived on Iroquois Drive in Mt. Lebanon (my playground as a kid was where the Galleria mall now sits).

Photos tracing our long association with this church, which spans four generations. And four generations of Mehaffey men when my son Dan was born. He's pictured on my lap as an infant, with my father William Graham and my maternal grandfather John Sautter standing behind us.



Once scanned, the images permitted me to reach out electronically and reestablish connections. I sent them on to cousins, former business associates, children, grandchildren and others with short remarks. I was not prepared for the heartfelt gratitude recipients expressed back to me.

These experiences add to the inventory of stories that are

repeated at family gatherings. Despite reminders that I have told the stories before, I continue to do so lest these memories fade with time. They are part of family lore and are important to future generations.

What have I learned?

Basements need to be cleaned out. With a little work my life, and memories, can be better organized. Ancestors should be honored and better organization enables the honoring of them. We pass this way but once and perhaps we can learn something by looking at treasured memories from our lives, with gratefulness, humility, faith and also a bit of humor.

Living with the virus intentionally

by Katie Doyle

How am I living through a pandemic? With prayer and intentionality. We all agree on prayer. But intentionality?

Jack and I are retired empty-nesters. Before the pandemic, my days were filled with coffee shops; visits with friends; appointments; visits to grown daughters and their families; libraries and concerts and museums; tutoring; hikes in state parks near and far. These are not possible now.

Now when I wake and think of the coming day, I think of the coming 16 hours – 16 hours that have as much promise as a farmer's fallow field in March. How to fill 16 hours?

My efforts to keep up with the news take less than an hour – scanning the Post-Gazette in the morning and tomorrow's Wall Street Journal in the evening. I'm guilty of minimal housework and of avoiding any cooking chore that requires any investment of time. Weather permitting, I'll spend a couple hours on a walk or hike.

For the remaining hours, I think of "intentionality." Annie Dillard ("Pilgrim at Tinker Creek") reminds her readers: "This is how you spend this afternoon, and tomorrow morning, and tomorrow afternoon. Spend the afternoon. You can't take it with you."

There are many things I cannot do – curing coronavirus is at the top of the

list – so I concentrate on what I can do. Intentionality. What can I do today to be a bit of light or salt or leaven? Is there some piece of useful work that I've avoided for lack of time? What has God gifted me to do? I try to fill the hours of my day with intentional actions – things I'm eager to do and things I'm not eager to do but that God has put in my path. Worthwhile things. Intentional things.

I wish I could be with my daughters. Meg (in Atlanta) is home with two school-age kids and a preschooler and a husband working from home. Sarah (in central Texas) is home with two school-age kids, a kindergartner and a police-officer husband. They both could use an extra pair of hands and a respite. I worry especially for my Texas son-in-law. He and his colleagues are responding only to emergency calls, which usually mean domestic situations. Can he protect himself in strange homes from invisible threats? One day, the arrestee in the backseat of his patrol car announced he had The Virus. Sarah and her family were strictly quarantined indoors until testing showed the arrestee had an advanced case of "jail-itis."



My efforts to walk on God's path these days are small. Connect with friends and family. Participate in Bible study. Learn new music and revisit the old. Read masterful authors who are new to me. Enjoy the quiet, and wait.

These are strange days. Who knew the world could be locked down? I'm also being intentional about waiting: Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord! (Psalm 27:14)

Learning patience from a patient virus

by Travis Timmons

Ron Klain, President Obama’s Ebola virus lead, as well as chief of staff for vice-presidents Al Gore and Joe Biden, said this about the coronavirus: “The virus is more patient than us.”

Years from now, Mr. Klain’s statement is what I will probably remember about our Covid-19 spring.

On the surface, patience is an odd word to associate with a global pandemic; yet patience is what I am trying to learn during this time.

The word cuts two ways. On the one hand, it describes the virus’ inexorable pace — insensible to the economy, the school year, the sports calendar, medical preparedness, and even Christ’s body gathering in person. Patiently, the virus has upended everything.

On the other hand, patience is what I’ve needed more than ever. Yes, patience for the long days at home for us two working parents, a 4th grader, a 4-year-old, and two mischievous kittens. Patience for when the house walls and ceiling feel like a tight

skin glued to me, or for deciphering the chaotic flow of a Google Classroom with our 10-year-old, while his younger brother begs for another three sheets of drawing paper, while I’ve just remembered the two follow up emails I forgot to send, and, oh, one kitten is trying to eat a rubber band.

But also patience in a deeper sense. A theological sense. Patience like Job, finally silent enough to listen to God (Job 38-41). In his work “Repetition,” the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard imagines that, after God’s discourse, Job sits, finally and silently, in a state of not only acceptance, but also (more crucially perhaps), readiness. Here, a German word is useful: “Gelassenheit,” a state of letting be and readiness for whatever comes next. This is the kind of patience I’m trying to learn.

Because I, too, have been impatient; just as bad as the gun-waving and camo-clad protesters in Michigan, or those on social media shaming us for any hygienic discretion.

Probably, we all are impatient. We expect

human ingenuity and technology to save us. As usual. The human mastery of everything is our 21st century gospel. But the virus is more patient than us. And bigger than us.

It’s humbled me. I feel smaller. And I think this is good. I imagine that Job felt smaller by the end of his story. Our Christian faith teaches smallness, because our lives are not our own. We are God’s. We are mere puffs of air. Covid-19 reminds me of this reality.

Of course, there’s a lovely irony in being patient, and like Job, being ready. In this state of readiness, we can receive the divine gift of salvation. What better time than Easter season for this gift? God’s son lives. As Pope Benedict XVI explains in his trilogy on Christ’s life, Christianity is built on a gift: the gift of “being-with and being-in Christ.” This gift, he continues, is the foundation for new life.

Ironically, the coronavirus humbles us into patience and smallness, but God is waiting for us with something much greater than any pandemic: new life.

Seeing the world through a child’s eyes

by Cara Webster

During the Mt. Lebanon teachers’ strike of 1994, my sister, Erin, and I transformed our living room into a school house.

As the big sister, I assumed the role of teacher; she, my star pupil. Over the next two weeks, we immersed ourselves in the world we had created. I taught Erin material I was learning in fourth grade, two years ahead of her level. I assigned homework. Erin enthusiastically played the student and put forth her best effort.

Looking back on it now, I can recognize this play as a survival tactic: a way to retain normalcy and cope with the sudden and severe change to our daily lives. In my training as a school psychologist, I learned an explanation for my impulse: a return to routine helps one feel more in control in the face of trauma or uncertainty.

Now, 26 years later, I find myself in a familiar situation with two significant distinctions. I now play the role of the parent of two children, Charlie and Mae, ages 3 and 8 months; and the disruption is far more life-altering and fraught with fear. My instincts remain the same, although now I have a living hope that has come with a deeper understanding of God’s love.

I am grateful that I am planted in God, and how He made me. I found myself



taking inspiration from my childhood, and so we set up a school in our playroom and invited the established routine of preschool into our lives.

Charlie’s classmates all attend in stuffed animal form and we go through the preschool activities in order. We also incorporate a daily theme that dictates everything from the craft to the books we read. Our themes inspire our play. Charlie, Mae and I sailed the seas and searched for buried treasure on Pirate Day; dug for fossils in the backyard on Dino Day; splashed in an inflatable pool on Beach Day; pitched a tent and roasted marshmallows on Camping Day; and boy did we build on our many Construction Days.

Every morning before school, we read from a book at the breakfast table. The clear favorite for both Charlie and me has been “Winnie-the-Pooh.”

In the concluding chapter of the series, Christopher Robin heads off to school to learn all sorts of things, to begin his journey toward adulthood, and leave his childhood friends behind.

Hundred Acre Wood has been a world of his creation with characters that come to life in his imagination. It is a safe haven he has escaped to and learned from and perhaps, as the text implies, a place that is difficult to return to as an adult. Difficult, but not impossible.

Indeed, perhaps the only hope we have of returning to the childlike joys of our youth is to be led by a child, to intentionally tune out the adult world and be present with our children. And perhaps, for a moment, we will have the gift of seeing the world through their eyes, as Jesus instructs us to do. In this way, I found that it was they who were in fact protecting me.

Grampie, what's quarantine?

My 7-year-old granddaughter, who was not self-quarantining but visiting last weekend, asked me the question found in the headline.

She knew that it had something to do with staying home but wanted to go deeper. A simple, "It means you are not going back to school until August," would not suffice.

"But what is it?" she persisted.

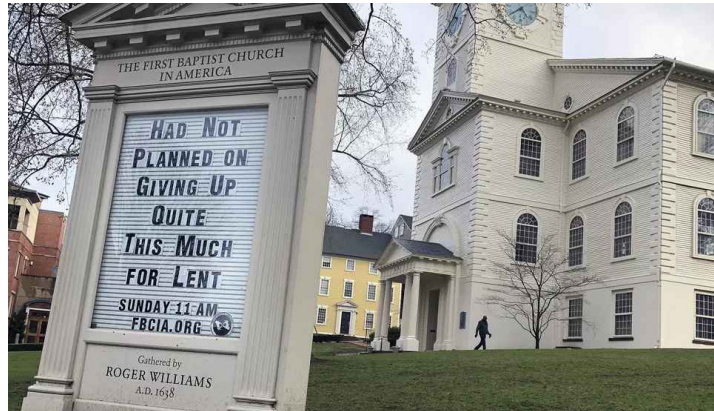
Children and adults often use words as labels for things they can point to but which they cannot define. Quarantine is one of those words.

Its etymology reveals roots in the Italian language and the word "quarantina," which means 40. Ships coming from Asia to Mediterranean Europe in the 14th century were required to anchor outside the port of Venice for 40 days in order to curb the spread of the Black Death carried by rats aboard ship.

Quarantine is an imposed period of isolation, separation, testing and trial. Typically, it is used to curb the spread of disease. Even in the Bible we read of the priests imposing a quarantine upon those who were suffering from various skin ailments, leprosy most likely.

While one must tread carefully when employing numerology to interpret a biblical text, it cannot be denied that 40 holds a prominent place in the Scriptures.

The Noahic flood was caused by rain that lasted 40 days and 40 nights. Moses



was twice on Mt. Sinai for 40 days when receiving the law from God. Jonah called the people of Nineveh to repentance and in 40 days they did.

In the New Testament, Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness for 40 days. In Acts 1, we are told that after He was raised from the dead, Jesus made numerous appearances for 40 days prior to His ascension.

What can happen in 40 days during a quarantine? The biblical accounts suggest that God speaks, God acts, He pursues fellowship, meets needs, displays His character, convicts and, yes, He punishes. For the most part, with some notable exceptions, a 40-day quarantine is accompanied by pain.

In his classic book "The Problem of Pain," C.S. Lewis famously wrote: "We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains. It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

What is God shouting to us through Covid-19? Is it divine punishment?

During a service of prayer and supplication following the 9/11 tragedy, a former member of Beverly Heights suggested as much, that God's wrath was poured out upon a people who would not reverence Him as the one living and true God.

Is that what the coronavirus is all about – God's megaphone to rouse us to confession and

repentance or worse, to punish us?

Throughout my ministry I have been asked by those in the midst of pain and tragedy if God was punishing them.

My answer was (and is) the same – I don't know. However, I always ask if they believe they are liable for God's punishment? Invariably they answer, "Yes."

I follow up by suggesting that if what they are suffering is being used by God to draw them back to Himself through repentance, confession and recommitment, then His megaphone has captured their attention. It has brought them to a place of restoration and life.

The difficulty and pain associated with Covid-19 may or may not be God's direct punishment for individual or corporate sin. But if through what we are enduring He has roused us from our deafness to His word, His will and His way, then we will see, even in our suffering, His amazing grace.

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