

A Letter from Pastor David Greenlund to a Beloved Community

A couple of weeks ago before the Pandemic fully seeped into all of our lives in a real way, I was invited to offer the opening prayer for the Minnesota Legislature. The following prayer I offer at the end is from Richard Rohr, a Franciscan at the Center for Action and Contemplation which he founded many years ago in New Mexico. I felt that it embodied all of our hopes and longings while at the same time being inclusive of all people present in such a public sphere. Some bowed their heads, some looked straight ahead, some crossed themselves, some wore an expression which gave little away as to any position.

In that moment, we were all on the brink of something invisible and larger than us, larger than our parties, our religions, our state, and our country. Everyone was vulnerable and pumping hand sanitizer in the halls and at desks. We were being challenged to think about the smallest of things taken for granted, like how to open a door without using your freshly washed hands. Now, over these past two weeks, we've been watching the Covid-19 pandemic spread, bringing with it cautions, closures, and warnings to physically isolate ourselves so as to slow the initial rates of infection to give over-burdened healthcare systems and those seeking help a better chance at recovery.

As we continue to get daily and even hourly updates concerning the seriousness upon us, our fears can certainly overwhelm us and knock us off our center. In times like these, of which there have been relatively few, we tend to want to physically come together for the support and care helping us to carry the burdens of fear with and for each other but this is exactly the thing we are called upon now to refrain from. This is going to be difficult but Do Not Fear, say the angels over and over again. We will need to help each other to not fear even while being separated.

While we are being called to physically isolate ourselves so as to break the chain-reaction of infection (think dominos in a row), we don't necessarily have to socially isolate ourselves. With all of the various ways of communicating with each other, we need to be mindful to reach out daily to a number of people. These days we have many media platforms to be connected (think voice, text, Facebook, Snapchat). In these ways we can maintain the connections we long for and are sustained by and perhaps remind us of the real creaturely need we take for granted to be physically present for each other in word and deed. Who would have ever imagined that we would be asked to love our neighbors by staying away from them?

In order to break the spread of the virus, the council at Peace Lutheran has decided to discontinue all activities until we understand it is safe to do so. In the meantime, we will be making decisions and notifying you of the various ways we plan to stay connected through YouTube, Facebook and email. We will be posting things on our webpage (peacelauderdale.com), so visit the site for info if you're able. If you are not, please call the church and we'll make arrangements to communicate otherwise.

As a reminder, you could say that Peace Lutheran has always opted to err on the side of a ministry of presence directly with people in their physical lives, so we are coming slowly to this social media world. We haven't been able to figure out how to get someone's furnace working, a pipe repaired or a toilet functioning by way of the Internet, but we're bound and determined to keep trying.

The whole wide world has ground to a halt as we all contemplate what it means to be humans living vulnerably in the world we all inhabit and hold, perhaps even more dearly now than ever. God is with all of Creation, now and always and promises resurrection will follow. So, I leave you today with Richard Rohr's prayer and the idea that we are all connected:

O Great Love, thank you for living and loving in us and through us. May all that we do flow from our deep connection with you and all beings. Help us become a community that vulnerably shares each other's burdens and the weight of glory. Listen to our hearts' longings now for the healing of our world.... Knowing you are hearing us better than we are speaking, we offer these prayers in all the holy names of God, Amen.

Blessings and Peace, Pastor Dave Greenlund