

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Links to Christ and Grace

*****Worship service and sermon posted each Saturday evening**

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgveCGQgn0okeiNXLcmZI_w?view_as=subscriber

Website: <https://www.christandgrace.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ChristandGracePetersburg/>

OFFERINGS: Thank you to all who sent in your contribution this past week. We know that this is an extraordinarily challenging time, with many facing serious financial hardship. So many of you who need the church right now feel terrible about not being able to support it financially. Please remove this from your list of worries. We are here to support each other, and we will get through this together. We know that those who are able to do more to support the church at this time will do so, recognizing that if the shoe were on the other foot, our fellow parishioners would gladly do the same for us. It's who we are and what we do.

For those who are able, please know that you can make a contribution electronically by going to "Give" at www.christandgrace.org. Offerings can be set up for a one time or recurring gift. The church is charged a fee for this service. If you are able to include the fee with your offering, the total amount is tax deductible. Or you can set up a regular payment through your bank's bill pay, or mail checks to Christ and Grace 1545 S. Sycamore Street, Petersburg, VA 23805.

PRAYER LIST: We beg you to feed the hungry, protect the refugee, embrace the distressed, house the homeless, nurse the sick, and comfort the dying. Especially we pray for Tyrone Allen, Robyn Arrington, Brian Hettinger, Horace Higgins, Mark Jones, Josh Lumley, Mike McKibbin, Addison Owens, Lilly Rudd, Mark Sheffield, Ted Simpson, Wendy Taft, Larry Tucker, and Paige Whitley.

WEDNESDAY SERVING OPPORTUNITY:

Did you know that you can serve others while you shop for your groceries?

Each Wednesday we are collecting food for the Hope Center Food Pantry. You may bring food and leave it in the plastic bin at the back door. If you would like to send a monetary contribution to the Hope Center they would be most appreciative. Send to The Hope Center at 827 Commerce Street, Petersburg, VA 23803. You can also donate via their website at dcuhopecenter.org. Items needed at this time are: canned fruits, vegetables, meats, tuna, stew, and pasta sauces - no glass. No pasta is needed at this time.

FORWARD DAY BY DAY (MAY-JUNE- JULY):

Available for pick up on Wednesdays at the back door of the church.

GENTLE REMINDER

The church building is closed for our safety. We are not sanitizing the building at this time so every person who comes in is not only putting themselves at risk but also is exponentially increasing the risk of infection for others. If you need something from the building please email or call and arrange with us to pick up things on Wednesdays when we can bring it out to your car. We appreciate your understanding and care for one another.

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

ZOOM BIBLE STUDY FOR EVERYONE, THURSDAYS AT 7 PM

We continue this Thursday, May 7 with chapters 5-7. This class is for everyone - whether you win or lose at Bible trivia! We will hear the stories of how the church became the church, and how the Holy Spirit empowered a group of scared and uncertain disciples in an unprecedented and unpredictable time. So yes, it's relevant. You may join us at any time.

If you are interested, please email Robin+ and she will send you the link and instructions to join the Zoom meeting each Thursday morning.

You can use any device that has a camera and microphone - smartphone or laptop or iPad or desktop, however it's more difficult when using a phone. You can go to zoom.us and find all sorts of helpful info. Here is another tutorial video to watch that I found helpful

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9isp3qPeQ0E&t=400s>

MESSAGE FROM BISHOP SUSAN HAYNES

As the world and the Church re-gathers

Yesterday, Gov. Ralph Northam announced that at the end of the day on May 14, he will begin to ease the "stay-at-home" restrictions that have governed our lives over the past several weeks. On May 15, he will allow the re-opening of some non-essential businesses such as gyms and hair salons, as well as limited worship gatherings of 10 or fewer people. The purpose of this easing is to see if we can re-enter the world in a cautious enough way so as to continue the flattening of the curve with respect to the pandemic of Covid-19. In other words, the restrictions are eased "for the sake of observing the metrics." If the metrics support these actions, then we will know if it is okay to enter Phase 1 of re-opening our state. If the metrics do not support these actions, we will have to adapt.

While all of us are eager to get back to church as we have known it, Phase 1 itself will allow only for gatherings limited to 10 people or fewer. Phase 2, when it begins, will lift the limit on the number of people gradually. Even then, guidelines regarding sanitization and social distancing will remain in place and require enforcement. Things will definitely be different. What this means for churches is that beginning May 15, there will not be an appreciable shift in what we do as Episcopalians. That is to say, my existing guidance remains in place. So long as the number present does not exceed 10, personnel may go to our church buildings to livestream/record worship. Staff may go to offices to conduct business in numbers of 10 or fewer with social distancing. The Sacrament may be taken to homes where people are ill. Outdoor gatherings not exceeding 10 people may proceed with requisite social distancing. This, of course, is a far cry from what we were once used to.

Many have asked for clear guidelines about how to "re-gather" church. Toward that end, I have assembled a panel of clergy, health professionals, mental health professionals, musicians and formation directors who will spend the next couple of weeks helping me to formulate clear guidelines by the end of the month as to how to re-gather the church safely. By that time, we should have a clearer picture as to how we can proceed safely.

You will recall that many health professionals, and even our governor, have said that we will not be able to move forward safely until we have gone 14 straight days with a decreased number of new cases and deaths in the State of Virginia. So far we have [not achieved that metric.](#)

Consequently, a full-scale opening, even a limited scale opening, is not indicated at this point. Indeed, it would be profoundly unwise and would hazard the health of the weakest among us and put at risk the health of others.

I am sympathetically aware of the urgency that some of you have expressed regarding your desire to begin gathering again. I am feeling somewhat impatient, as well. Yet in Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's April 29 [Word to the Church](#), he wisely exhorts us to ask the question time and again, "What would Love do?" As we approach the re-gathering of our church, let us be mindful of the way of love, of the way of making room for one another, of the way of being the Church. And rest assured, that God is with us as we do.

As events unfold and the possibility of re-gathering emerges, I look forward to providing you with new guidance "for the living of these days" and for each to come.

Yours faithfully in Christ,
Bishop Susan

MESSAGE FROM ROBIN+

Where have you heard the voice of the Shepherd this past week? I have been listening and one of the things I am hearing is that we are tired. We are perhaps less anxious but maybe that is because we are exhausted from being anxious. I have tried to be more intentional about listening for what the Shepherd would have me do or not do, say or not say. It has helped me to rest beside still waters and consider this strange time in deeper ways rather than simply reacting to each new challenge, each new burst of bad news. I have been praying more and breathing deeply and the Shepherd is showing me a deeper meaning in all of this.

As we continue thinking about what the Church will look like after this pandemic, focusing on five areas of work that can help us move forward in new and sustainable ways as a community of faith, our third area of focus is that of meaning making. Humans cannot live without meaning. The greater our sense of uncertainty, the more desperately we grasp for a handhold, a shred of something that reminds us of who we are and where we have been. We may need help interpreting the present moment in relationship to our shared past. This week I have realized that it's hard to find the meaning in a situation when we are filled with fear and anxiety. If we can calm our fear and anxiety, we can begin the work of restoring our lives; we can begin to explore what we have learned in the events that seem to have turned us upside down.

Part of this work is theological in nature. We all grapple with the deep questions of our faith. Where is God when people are suffering? Why are we here? Is God punishing the world? Part of our meaning making work is to really listen to one another; to listen without judgment and allow expression of feelings and experiences that are unique to each of us.

It can be helpful for us to think about those times in our history that remind us of what's going on now. How did we endure, how did we get through the challenges? What higher values did we bring to that moment? How might those same values guide us now?

This is not simply returning to the old ways that made us feel good, but an exploration of why those ways made us feel good and then some thinking about how we might do new things that will create those feelings of joy and wholeness we all long for right now. Our higher values as a faith community will guide us into the future.

Science staff writer Ed Yong of the Atlantic wisely reminds us, “The pandemic is not a hurricane or a wildfire. It is not comparable to Pearl Harbor or 9/11. Such disasters are confined in time and space. The SARS-CoV-2 virus will linger through the year and across the world. ‘Everyone wants to know when this will end,’ said Devi Sridhar, a public-health expert at the University of Edinburgh. ‘That’s not the right question. The right question is: How do we continue?’”

As we begin to look ahead and plan for churches to reopen, there is much work to be done to ensure that we will be safe when we gather. There will be a need for a group to plan and implement safety procedures at Christ and Grace, based on those provided by our Diocese. Worship will be different than it was on the third Sunday in Lent. Stay tuned for more information on that as it becomes available. If you would like to be part of the team that is working on our reopening, please let me know. All that we do will be focused on the work of meaning making for our parish as we move forward together, one step at a time.
Easter Blessings, Robin+

For insights shared I am indebted to Susan Beaumont - Finding Our New Normal, April 20, 2020
<https://www.congregationalconsulting.org/finding-our-new-normal/>

Ed Yong, Science Staff Writer, The Atlantic, “Our Pandemic Summer” April 14, 2020
<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/04/pandemic-summer-coronavirus-reopening-back-normal/609940/?fbclid=IwAR3w3g0D9Ubp-aOyPZ9Lp18abINUp5dINM1Ra2LgktfE4LLjUyxJFLxpU3I>

Sermon for the 5th Sunday of Easter, May 10, 2020

Acts 7:55-60

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look,” he said, “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he died.

1 Peter 2:2-10

Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture:

“See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner”,

And “A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people;

once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

John 14:1-14

Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it."

There is a recurring mention of rocks and stones and cornerstones in our readings today. You may remember from geology class that there are three classifications of rocks. Igneous rocks are created from volcanic lava that has cooled and solidified. Sedimentary rocks are formed by the accumulation of earlier rocks, moved and formed under the influence of gravity, water, and pressure. Metamorphic rocks are formed by subjecting existing rocks to extreme temperature and pressure.

There's no exam coming after the sermon, but keep in mind that in general, rocks are formed under severe conditions – fire and pressure, glaciers and water erosion. It is for this reason that rocks are hard and strong, and yet they are over and over transformed by the same elements that created them. From boulders to pebbles, rocks and stones are everywhere. You can collect them, paint them, landscape with them; and you can throw them.

Throwing stones - why do we do that? We start as children, using real stones or hurtful words; we exclude, we blame, we shame. As we grow up, we pick up larger, harder rocks like passive aggressive behaviors, racism, and weapons of mass destruction.

We have all thrown a stone or two, and we all know the rhyme from our childhood - Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me. Only it's not true, is it? Because sometimes words do hurt, even more than stones. And the fire and pressure of those words we hear as children sometimes make our adult hearts like stone. And wasn't it Jesus who said, "let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone?" Jesus knows we are all fully capable of some stone throwing behavior. Oh, it may have been awhile since we bent down, picked up a stone, and threw it at someone else, but what about the metaphorical stones? What might they be and how do we throw them?

Perhaps they are the hurtful words we hurl, even at our loved ones, in our anger and frustration. Maybe they are words of criticism, condemnation or judgment. Maybe our favorites are the stones of sarcasm or the weighty rocks of holding grudges. Sometimes they are in the form of exchanging heated words with those with whom we do not agree. Just look at social media. It has become a stoning pit.

Lately there seems to be a rockslide of hate and vitriol unlike anything we have experienced before. According to social scientist Arthur Brooks, we don't have an anger or hate problem in society, as much as we have a contempt problem, which is far worse. Contempt is defined as a mix of the primary emotions of disgust and anger. The Latin word *contemptus* means "scorn." It's the feeling that a person or a thing is beneath consideration, worthless, or deserving scorn.

Contempt is a very dangerous thing. Its danger lies in contempt's peculiar ability to dehumanize its target. Widespread public contempt has the potential to undermine the moral basis of all human relationships and, indeed, of human community itself.

When Arthur Brooks asked the Dalai Lama, "What do I do when I feel contempt?" The Dalai Lama said, "Show warm-heartedness." When we encounter contempt we can choose to react to it with warm-heartedness.

And this brings us to the stoning of Stephen. As a member of the early Christian community, Stephen was assigned to serve food to those who were hungry and to tend to the widows. But the Holy Spirit had in mind that Stephen's gift of preaching would also be of great service! We only hear the ending of the story in today's reading, so it's helpful to know that Stephen had preached what we might call a fire and brimstone sermon to the council that day. He recounted the history of the people of Israel, speaking truth to them about their failure to hear God's purposes as spoken through the prophets. He reminded them that long ago God told Moses that they were a stiff-necked people, which enraged the council and caused them to grind their teeth! Then filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, he saw the heavens open! When he described what he saw, the contempt of the council could no longer be contained and they dragged him out of the city and stoned him to death.

It's a painful story, yet it remains true through the ages. Those who live in contempt destroy relationships and even lives. The heat, pressures, and raging waters of life can harden our hearts to stone, and yet, our hearts can be transformed by the cornerstone of our faith. Those who follow Jesus bear witness to him by imitating his kind-heartedness, his peaceful self-sacrifice. In his last words, Stephen commends his spirit to Jesus, just as Jesus commended his to the Father. As Stephen prays for his enemies and forgives his attackers praying, "Lord, do not hold this against them," we remember the words Jesus spoke from the cross, "Father, forgive them."

There are always going to be stones available for throwing, and people who are angry enough to throw them. Human anger stokes the fire of hatred and applies the pressure of judgment, it ices into glaciers of contempt and causes waves of erosion that threaten to sweep away society. But God is stronger than anything that can wound us. God heals our hurt and our anger, transforming our stony hearts into warm-heartedness, and in turn working through us to transform others with the power of love and forgiveness.

Stephen shows that the faithful response to contempt is warm-heartedness and forgiveness. One need not be divine to do what Stephen did. Jesus tells us: "The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father."

The next time you see a stone, pick it up. Feel the weight of it in your hand. Let it remind you of a time you felt contempt and chose to throw a stone rather than forgive. Then remember Stephen, who forgave those who were stoning him. Remember that he could not do that without first gazing at the glory of God. As you turn the stone over in your hand, let it remind you that we are all living stones, chosen and precious in God's sight, that Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith and our strong foundation. Let it remind you that God is the rock of our salvation. Amen.

Arthur C. Brooks <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/08/opinion/the-thrill-of-political-hating.html>

Karen Stohr https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/23/opinion/our-new-age-of-contempt.html?_r=0