

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: We are thankful for you!

Your faithfulness in sending your contributions to the church is something for which we are most grateful. Your gifts allow us to continue the ministries of Christ and Grace even when we cannot be physically present to one another. We can support our church and the wider community with our prayers, our acts of service, our participation through online worship and study, our reading of mailed news and sermons, and our financial gifts.

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 13 with chapters 8-9. 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.

MESSAGE FROM BISHOP SUSAN HAYNES

All things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful, but not all things build up. Do not seek your own advantage but that of the other."

(1 Corinthians 10:23-24)

Many have contacted the Diocesan office requesting clarification of directives for the re-opening of churches in light of Governor Northam's recent orders. Please be advised that even though Gov. Northam has given churches permission to open and operate at 50% capacity, **Bishop Haynes has not yet authorized the resumption of public worship services.** In the next two weeks a task force of medical professionals, clergy, musicians and formation directors will develop guidelines for the safe re-opening of churches. We appreciate your patience as we seek a way forward in the midst of confusing information.

MESSAGE FROM ROBIN+

As we continue to explore five areas of focus in our series on moving forward as the church in a time of pandemic, we focus this week on defining one good next step. This follows naturally from last week's focus on meaning making. When we can think about what gives our lives meaning, both personally and in our church community, we can name our strengths and passions. Doing this helps us understand that it is in using these strengths and passions that we create meaning in our life.

So how do we apply any strength or passion? If we follow the adage on how to eat an elephant – one bite at a time – we can apply that to defining one good next step. Doing this as a community helps us to know that we are pursuing something that matters now and gives us a shared common cause. An example that comes to mind is our ongoing new project to collect food for the food pantry at the Hope Center. It's an easy way to participate in a greater good, whether we are dropping our donations in the orange container at the back door, or going to the Hope Center website to make an online financial donation.

We can't yet know what tomorrow will bring but we can do one thing that takes us in that direction. Let's spend some time remembering our passions, both individually and as the parish, and then connect our passions to our gifts and resources. From this work we can begin to sense what our one good next step might be. What are you longing to do and might it be something to further our mission in the church? I invite you to think about your own passions and how we might integrate them into our new normal at Christ and Grace in this moment and in the weeks, months, and year to come.

We don't know what tomorrow will bring. The truth is we have never known that, but perhaps it has taken a pandemic to remind us. I encourage you to tend to your soul, to practice self-care, and be gentle with yourself and those around you in these challenging days. Listen for the desires and passions that want to emerge in the new life that awaits you, and invite the Holy Spirit to come alongside you with creativity, energy, and strength to discover what your next one good step might be, both for yourself and for our life together at Christ and Grace.

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/>

Readings for the Sixth Sunday of Easter

https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Easter/AEaster6_RCL.html

Sermon for the 6th Sunday of Easter, May 17, 2020

Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them." *John 14:15-21*

I have stopped counting the days since the quarantine began, mostly because I am no longer always sure which day it is. I have to stop and think sometimes. When I wake up in the morning after a night of tossing and turning, I have to think with some effort to realize what day it is, and what I am supposed to do that day. In his weekly Habits of Grace message this week, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry said, "this pandemic has been sort of a discombobulation or a confusion about what time it is and what day it is." Even the Presiding Bishop is discombobulated!

I imagine that the disciples were feeling much the same way in their final days with Jesus before he was crucified. In our Gospel we are reading part of what is called the final discourse, where Jesus is telling the disciples what will happen and what they will need to know. He's reminding them of all that he taught them even as the authorities were tracking down Jesus, and in all this intensity the disciples finally came to understand that things were about to change, that nothing was going to go as they had planned, and that the future would look very different.

This might sound familiar to us in this pandemic as we fear the unknowns of the COVID virus. We hear new information every day about what might happen, and what can no longer happen, and how things are changing and will be changed forever. It's a lot to absorb, process, and accept. Like the disciples we may be fearful, confused, and anxious. We might be angry or sad or in grief over the loss of some very important events, routines, social gatherings, and perhaps even the loss of life of someone dear to us. Suddenly life has changed and the future is uncertain.

Like the disciples, our world has been discombobulated, turned upside down, and we may be feeling like orphans, left alone to make sense of this strange new place where we find ourselves. With the disciples we hear Jesus say, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.” I am pretty sure that the disciples were more discombobulated than ever when they heard Jesus say that. Maybe we are too. It’s a lot to take in on top of everything else that’s going on around us.

It might be helpful to know that while our translation says “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” this is not really a conditional statement. Jesus isn’t saying, “If you really love me, you’d better keep my commandments.” He is simply stating a fact. A more accurate translation would be “Since you love me, you will instinctively keep my commandments.” In this love that is given, not earned, we live lives of goodness, revealing and sharing this love in the world.

You may remember what Jesus said to the disciples in chapter 13, when he fed them and washed their feet. “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John’s text is dense, it calls for attention, thought and prayer and yet, it is so simple, this giving and receiving of love. The closest thing I know of to describe it, is the love between a parent and newborn. An unconditional love that is not required, it just is. Perhaps that’s what Jesus is getting at when he then talks about being orphaned. There is not much that is more heartbreaking than losing a parent or losing a child. Even when we are older, and we reach that milestone when we no longer have a living parent, there is an existential change that happens. Jesus understands this and so he promises not to leave us orphaned.

In the moment when you feel most like an orphan, most abandoned, most lost and alone, Jesus promises to be with you. On that day, Jesus says, you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. This promise to be with us, within us, is the most amazing gift. It’s pure love.

This gift of pure love can be especially comforting to us right now if we will receive it, if we will allow it to fill our being and direct our life. Because life is pretty overwhelming right now. Even if we are physically okay – safe and in good health with our basic needs met, we are witnessing the pain and suffering of so many others. We are uncertain about what tomorrow will be like, never mind the future. We find ourselves unmotivated, forgetful, anxious, tearful, exhausted. These are real and valid experiences and emotions resulting from life during a pandemic.

When we don’t know what to expect or where the truth really lies, when we no longer have a parent to tell us the truth and make things okay, when our social structures are not working and we no longer feel safe, we begin to feel like orphans. Who is going to fix things and who is going to tell us the truth, and then comfort us in the reality of that truth? Jesus has given us the answer. The Advocate, also known as the Spirit of truth, the Comforter, Counselor, and Helper will be with us, and within us, connecting us to the love of God. Jesus has asked the Father to give us this gift which we receive as we live our lives with love.

This giving and receiving of love is so simple and yet it is the hardest thing we ever do. This is why we need the Advocate, to comfort, help, and show us how to love. Jesus does not leave us orphaned and promises to come to us and be with us, though not always in the way we imagine or even in the way we want. He comes as the great I AM, the one who was and is and is to come, the one who reminds us to love one another as he has loved us.

We are all orphans, trying to make sense of a very unpredictable time, trying fix things we cannot control, and yet we are not alone. The great and divine mystery is that we have been given a gift from God through which we experience the love of Jesus, love for one another, and the indwelling of the Spirit. Following Jesus in the way of love reveals this gift to our very discombobulated world. Amen.