

## A Letter from the Rector for March 20, 2020

---

Dear People of St. James',

I think that one of the fundamental challenges of our Christian faith is that we are confronted with paradoxes all the time. Jesus came to the world, and turned so many of our assumptions, habits, and customs upside down. In the Kingdom of God that Jesus spoke about, the mighty are cast down, the weak are lifted up, foolish notions turn out to be profound wisdom, and those who appear to have died and departed from us are truly dwelling in light everlasting. As we are now all facing days, weeks, and months of physical distance from one another, I have to wonder if we might be entering into yet another Christian paradox. Yes, we will be isolated from one another, but might that separation in body reveal to us a closeness that has always been there, but that we simply took for granted? Might these darkened days reveal more clearly the strands of light, those threads of fellowship and love, that weave all through our community? We shall see! After all, it is only in the deep darkness of a moonless night that we are able to behold the full glory of the stars above us. Yes, on a certain level, we may know with our intellect they are always up there, day and night. But how often do we have the chance to stop, look up, and appreciate their glory? My hope and prayer, as your priest and pastor, is that this time of uncertainty and waiting might allow us to see more clearly the presence of God in our lives and God's movement working through our community. Indeed, I suspect that much is going to be revealed *to*, and *through*, and *about* us in these coming days!

The reality of drastic change in our common life is now upon us. **Until further notice, and for the foreseeable future, all worship services and other gatherings of St. James' Church members are now suspended.** Initially, I had announced only a two-week suspension, but it is now clear that our physical distancing practice will have to continue for quite some time. Of

course, the crushing blow of that reality for our Christian community is that we will most likely not be observing the meaningful worship of Holy Week at all like we have in the past. But in these extraordinary days, we will be taking extraordinary steps to make the best of all the resources at our disposal, and to think afresh and “outside the box” to observe the final weeks of Lent and Holy Week as a dispersed community. So, I invite you to stay tuned for updates, and to keep an open mind and heart as we try out new ways of staying together while remaining apart. (Yes, that’s our latest Christian paradox bursting to life!)

Though the halls of St. James’ Church are now closed for parish gatherings, the life of our Church very much continues on. **This Sunday, March 22nd, we will be offering one 9am service of Morning Prayer streamed live online onto our church’s Facebook page.** Attached [here](#) is the bulletin for that service, for you to download and use to fully participate from home. (Keep in mind--If you do not have a Facebook account, you can still watch the live stream through a web browser. Step by step instructions are found [here](#).) We found last Sunday’s Morning Prayer offerings to be quite successful, with over 500 views by worshippers near and far. We made adjustments “on our feet” and in real time that morning, in order to improve sound and video quality, and are working on connecting the stream to our church website’s [“Online Resources”](#) page as well. I hope you will join us and help spread the word that distance is not holding us or the Word back here at St. James’!

Looking to the week ahead, I have scheduled daily opportunities for us to gather together remotely for prayer and worship. On our parish calendar, found on our website [here](#), you will notice offerings of Evening Prayer at 8pm on Tuesday and Thursday, and Compline on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 9pm. We will also have an informal service of Morning Prayer on Saturday morning at 9am, followed by a virtual “coffee hour” time for online conversation, fellowship, and checking in. **Unlike our Sunday morning worship, these events will all be held using a platform called “Zoom.”** To join in the service, simply go to the parish calendar at the time

of the worship and click on the calendar event. The description of the event will open for you, with a web link that will take you directly into the meeting. *Note: you will need to download the free Zoom application onto the device (computer/tablet/smart phone) that you are using. Just follow the prompts and you will be up and running in no time.* With Zoom, we each will have the capability to join together both with audio and video. That means we will be able to remotely see and hear one another, as if we were in the same room together. We have begun using Zoom for parish meetings this week, and while not entirely perfect, the platform does seem to be a good “next-best” option for bringing us together face-to-face in these days of a pandemic crisis. I thank you in advance for your patience and for your sense of humor as we make the best of what we’ve got to work with. So, bring your *Book of Common Prayer*, (or use the handy, user-friendly online version of it [here](#)), follow the zoom links, and off we will go!

As we are trying out these new ways of worshipping, I will be offering to lead us in prayer together. But my hope is to incorporate others into leadership roles in the worship as soon as possible. If you are interested in taking a turn reading the scriptures during the services this week, please let me know directly. Though Zoom is not designed for reading or singing *in unison*, it is very good when we *take turns*, and so it will be easy to “pass the talking stick” to one another as we step up to our virtual lectern.

I would also like to offer a couple of resources that are now available to the public, for you to consider this week. While some of you may be familiar with the services of Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, you might not be as familiar with the service of **Compline** from our Book of Common Prayer. Sometimes called the “good-night” prayers of the Church, Compline comes to us from the monastic practice of prayer offices spread throughout the day. If families with children would like to pray Compline together through these days of closed schools ahead, there is a wonderful book available [here](#) that offers Compline in a storybook format, followed by the “grownup” text directly from *The Book of Common Prayer*. I commend it to you as a resource for

all the families of St. James to find a peaceful closing to the day, whether or not you can join us for the Zoom Compline services.

If you are longing for a spiritual nugget to nibble on for your daily Lenten journey ahead, I also can recommend a book by a renowned and insightful Episcopal priest named Barbara Cawthorne Crafton. Her text, available [here](#), offers a meditation for every day of Lent, based upon a text of Episcopal hymnody. While we are not able at this time to raise our voices together in worship, praise, and thanksgiving, Crafton's meditations will give us a chance to more deeply reflect on the *words* of our hymns, texts that we might not get a chance to deeply explore in the course of our usual Sunday morning practices.

And one more reminder: Though our building is now closed to the public, our staff are still very much at work, albeit in more isolated ways. This is a time when staff are both keeping the basic machinery of our parish moving, but also getting around to tasks and projects that may have been waiting in the wings for an opportunity such as our current state of affairs. This means that, although we all are not physically gathering into our church buildings, our expenses have not been suspended. Our custom of gathering together our offerings and pledges to support the life and ministries of our church on Sunday mornings has come to an abrupt halt, and so we must now adjust and find new ways to offer our gifts of thanksgiving to God. **So, please be sure that you continue to submit your pledges to St. James' through these trying times.** You may mail in your offerings, drop your envelopes into the mail slot in at the office door, or perhaps take this opportunity to explore ways you may arrange an automatic payment through your bank. Because we are no longer benefiting from a plate collection during our worship, it will be especially important for the continuing life and vitality of our church that we keep up with our pledges.

Finally, on a pastoral note, and as a reminder of how important it is that we hold fast to one another through these challenging days, I bid you prayers for the repose of the soul of Girlette Warner,

mother of Cheryl Harewood. Please also pray for Cheryl, as she is facing the additional pain of losing loved one who is abroad, in these times of great uncertainty for international travel. May light perpetual shine upon our sister Girlette, and may our prayers and abiding love comfort Cheryl and all those who are mourning their loss.

In such upside down times as these, I take comfort and assurance in the truth that Jesus came into our world *because* it was in desperate need of disruption. We *needed* to reset our relationships with God and one another, and that's why God came among us, to show us the power of love for transforming our lives and filling them with meaning. So, in these darkened days, may that Light of Christ that once walked the earth now shine into our lives as only that invisible Light can, and then shine out from us to spread hope and peace to all we touch, even while we are kept apart.

Yours in Christ,

*Fr. Dustin+*

### **Psalm 139:11-12**

*If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.*