

May 17, 2020

Micah 6:8
Romans 12:4-8

We are two-thirds of the way on our “resurrection” journey from Easter’s leaving the tomb to Pentecost’s gift of the Holy Spirit. Our journey has been one of trying to find our way out of or through this period of locked-down, shelter-in-place living. What is helping me find my way through the uncertainty and, at times, darkness I have been feeling the last two months is my recognizing and naming the personal self-discoveries that have come when I take time to breath.

The first, and most important, discovery is the over-arching theme of our Easter season worship services: With a Little Help from My Friends. Even if I cannot be with you physically, your prayers, phone calls, Zoom meeting gatherings, and just knowing you are there, my friends, all have been very important to keeping me positive and well. As cliché as it has become, it is still true – it takes a village.

This, of course, led to the next important understanding – the importance of community, and even the need for being in one another’s physical presence for our emotional, spiritual, and even physical well-being. What I am hoping our society will learn through this experience is that no one succeeds alone, on their own. The idea that a person can be “self-made” is a myth. More than that, I pray we see the importance of individuals, like janitors who clean our toilets and are mostly invisible. Hopefully, going forward, the invisible workers will hold a place of honor and be supported – by our recognizing the importance of their work and increasing their pay.

These learnings that are coming to the forefront have to do with our social interactions. This week I want to name and lift up a different, positive aspect of these uncertain times:

our re-discovered gifts. I have been hearing from a variety of people who have been gardening more than ever, sewing again, reading, doing jigsaw puzzles, knitting, cooking, baking, and even, as I mentioned in the Children’s Message, playing games.

What was coming through to me, as people told me what they were doing, was a gladness, a satisfaction about a re-discovery of past talents or enhancement of gifts they had been using. It has the feeling of getting ourselves back to basics. For most of us these new or renewed activities have been a supportive light in the midst of the darkness of these uncertain times. They help to move our focus from the non-stop, all-pervasive pandemic news and the resulting economic catastrophe to more positive and up-lifting activities.

Knowing so many people have been rediscovering gifts or working hard at new ones, knowing our lives have been pared down to the basics in some ways, I went to the scriptures to see what they had to say about this.

When thinking about the basics of our faith, my mind went immediately to the Hebrew Scriptures and Micah’s famous line, “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” This is as basic and succinct a directive about how God wants us to live in community with all creation as you can get. As far as I am concerned, all of Jesus’ teachings are just a defining, a filling-in of the meaning of this basic directive.

I pray, if you find yourself trying to find meaning in these unsettling times, if you long, as Ms. Breadthnach says, to realize what’s really important in life, then take to heart this line from Micah; memorize it; repeat it to yourself, daily, multiple-times each day; and practice it by asking yourself if

whatever action and/or interaction you are about to do is a following of this directive.

Whether you are gardening again, or sewing, or baking, or puzzling, whatever it is you are doing, is it just, loving, and done in humility? This question might sound strange or odd or not appropriate for the activity, but it is appropriate. Puzzling, for example, could be a group activity, a way to strengthen community. Or, it could be a form of meditation, giving your anxious mind and body a rest. This, then, is a form of kindness to others and/or to yourself. Being mindful of God's directive changes the activity in a positive way.

The other scripture reading that came to me had to do with our gifts. In writing to the church in Rome Paul pointed out that we are all part of a Oneness, we are a unity, we are, in Paul's words, the Body of Christ. As such, he said, we are members of the one body, with each one of us sharing with the body our individual gifts, which together makes the body healthy and whole.

Here is how this is working practically these days. Of the examples I share here, most are not new or re-discovered gifts, but the pandemic has revealed their importance.

My friend, George, is a gardener. He starts his own plants from seed. He always makes extra to share with people and with the church for the Summer Festival.

Narda is a sewer. She has sown clothes for as long as I have known her. Now she is sewing face-masks for the community – no charge.

Brianna loves to sing. She took the time to video herself and shared her talent with us in worship two weeks ago.

There are people cooking and delivering to those sick with the virus or seniors living alone.

Calling and writing to people is a gift. We have church members volunteering to call or write a note to members and friends of our church, especially our seniors, just checking in, making sure they are doing okay and asking if they need anything.

Those who are able are sharing from their financial gifts to make sure the ministries of Amicable Church continue; ministries such as, feeding the hungry, supporting shelters for the homeless, and small financial gifts to help those in need pay a bill.

Friends, these are the basics; the things that are really important. I give God thanks every day for how you are sharing the gifts you have been given by God's grace.

I pray that in these times of uncertainty, when you are feeling especially anxious about the future, you will repeat Micah's words: What does the Holy One require of me? To do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with my God.

And remind yourself, when you lovingly share your God-given gifts, you are following God's very basic directive.

Let us always give God thanks by using to God's glory the gifts we are re-discovering in these days. Amen.