**Not the Lent We Expected V**

+ Normal +

“Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:8-9)

“When will things be back to normal?” This is a question that we have asked ourselves or heard others ask. During this time when everything seems so strange, we long for the familiar to reappear. We long for the normal. Yet this break in the normal schedule and routine of life really offers us the chance for reflection and change.

It is well known that when people experience a significant change in their pattern of living it is a moment of “spiritual crisis”. This is true whether the change is a positive or negative one. For example, a person could lose a spouse or gain a spouse, move to a bigger house or downsize, get promoted or let go, a child could be born in a family or leave the nest. In all of these cases the change is significant enough to evoke a “spiritual” crisis. The only question is will this crisis be used for growth or for retreat?

We are all, collectively, in a time of change and upheaval. That is why I cited the passage above from Philippians. This passage encourages us to concentrate on the good, the honorable, the just, etc. and not focus on the old patterns of life, but reflect and set our minds on the values that God has given to us and try to imagine how we might live those out in our lives. It is important to remember that what is old is not always good, and what is new isn’t always good either. What is good is good.

The primary questions that we should be focused on are: How should we as individuals, as people, change what we value and how we act to bring about a more peaceful and joyful life for ourselves and others? How do we respond to what God is doing in the world at this time?

As we think about these questions let us remember that we are not alone with no guidance. We have the wisdom of the scripture, the experience of two thousand years of faith, our community of believers, and the presence of the Holy Spirit to guide us in these new and uncertain times.

Let me close this reflection with a prayer for guidance from Thomas à Kempis:

“Write your name, O Lord, upon my heart, there to remain so indelibly graven that no prosperity, no adversity, shall ever move me from your love. Be to me a strong tower of defense, a comforter in tribulation, a deliverer in distress, a very present help in trouble, and a guide to heaven through the many temptations and dangers of this life”. Amen. (Occasional Service Book of the Evangelical Lutheran Worship p.362)