

Greetings, everyone. Love and Easter Blessings to you and yours.

Today (as I write this, Wednesday, April 22nd) is Administrative Professionals Day, so let me begin with a big shout-out of gratitude - THANK YOU!!! - to Lisa (DSUC) and Joan (SJUC) for all that you do so well that allows us to do what we do. Thank you for sharing your dedication, attention to detail, organizational skills, care-filled listening, patience, and friendship. We are blessed to have you as such an important part of our faith families.

Over the last month, we have been focusing on living together during this pandemic. This week, our hearts are heavy with other news, as our nation grieves the lives lost in the recent tragedy in Nova Scotia. I was thinking about how difficult it is to be there for each other in times like this while trying to keep apart from each other, when a dear friend sent me a message. It was posted on Facebook by Pastor Shaun Hatfield from South Side United Baptist Church in Nova Scotia. I don't know him, but I am grateful to him for his touching message, and I want to share it with you. He wrote:

"Never once in my life have I ever lost someone I loved without being able to fall into the arms of other family members or close friends for mutual comfort and support in that time of deepest heartache. And, with three decades of experience working with families around death, I have been privileged to witness the healing power of human love through touch, hugs, handshakes, or soft words spoken in intimate settings. Sacred stuff.... In fact, across all time, all cultures, and all religions, family proximity, community closeness, and social gatherings stand timelessly at the core of all human grieving processes... And so, I am inwardly broken with incomprehension to wonder how so many devastated families can grieve, find comfort, and support each other without such personal touch, social proximity, or community gatherings (in this state of social distancing)... So please, would you pause right now and simply pray again that all these people with torn and shattered hearts will experience the comfort and presence of Almighty God and His love which is never far from lonely, hurting souls ... or an entire sobbing Province. ♡"

"Jesus wept."

Thank you, Shaun. I know many of us have experienced this tragedy through personal relationships with family and friends in Nova Scotia. Even though we are apart right now, we are with you.

And while we pray for healing, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the healing that seems to be happening in the world around us. As its human inhabitants struggle with life and death, health and economic uncertainty, the earth appears to be healing. More and more stories pop-up about cities where the air is cleaner because of almost no traffic or manufacturing. Birds and other wildlife... water... land... This has become a time of rest for creation. I can't help but wonder if this might be the beginning of a new step in our

understanding of what it means to live with respect in creation, as we say in our creed. Will our current slow-down help us focus on the many ways we abuse our home and the other living things with which we share it?

April 22nd is the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. First started in 1970 in the United States, it has now become a global movement, responsible to changes to environmental laws protecting air, water, and endangered species. This date, each year, invites us to think about how we live in and with the world around us. If you're looking for something to do to make an Earth Day connection, I came across these two simple and beautiful suggestions.

Go for a walk. It's something we can still do while respecting physical distancing. Remain considerate, aware, and respectful of others around you, and also of the life of creation around you. Let the song of birds comfort you. Let the fresh air refresh you. Let the gifts of God ground you. Even if you can't make it further than your front step or balcony or even an open window... take a moment to connect with creation and the Creator. Breathe.

And I recently learned about "forest bathing". No, it doesn't involve getting naked in the woods. Well, not necessarily! It is a translation of a Japanese word for immersing oneself in a forest atmosphere. Of allowing yourself to slow down and just BE in the presence of the forest. Many of us, I'm sure, have had these powerfully grounding and uplifting experiences. Some of us might be thinking that this sounds like a crazy-tree-hugger-thing. But there is lots of evidence that supports the physical, mental, and spiritual benefits of this activity. Whether you have the opportunity to be in a safe quiet place in the woods, or just sit under a tree, or stand in the garden, or (my personal favourite) stand waist-deep in the lake (although I'd suggest waiting a couple of months for that one)... 15 minutes of connecting can reduce stress, lower blood pressure, and help you relax. It also helps us plug into a bigger picture; an understanding that we are indeed called to live with respect in creation.

In the midst of this time of worry, sadness, and uncertainty, take time to connect with something that is bigger than yourself. Let your spirit breathe and remind itself that we are not alone. God is with us. In this. Through this. Always.

Peace.

Rev. Steve