

Greetings, everyone. From our places of self-isolation we send out love to each other.

We take a moment to especially remember all of those people who live with food insecurities, even more so at this time. And we remember with gratitude all of those who are working with food banks, making donations and deliveries, and shopping and delivering for family, friends, and neighbours. For most of us, however, this has been a time for eating. I love hearing stories from families who have been cooking homemade meals and eating with the family in ways that we were all too busy for a few months ago. I personally have rediscovered baking. A bit too much. It's time for me to practice "social distancing" from my pantry and fridge in order to "flatten the curve"! Yikes.

Next week, on the 21st, it is Ascension Day. It's forty days after Easter, when we read the story of Jesus leaving the disciples and ascending into heaven. For me, the underlying theme is, "Now what?" The disciples have been with the Risen Christ for forty days. We've talked before about the significance of the number 40 in our sacred story telling: 40 days of flooding with Noah and the animals, 40 years of wandering in the desert from slavery to freedom, Jesus tempted in the wilderness for 40 days (the model for our Lenten season), and more. We even say that life begins at 40; we take 40 winks to recharge. The number always refers to a period of discernment; a time to figure things out. God discovers during the flood that violence is not the answer. Abraham leads his people during a time of figuring out what it will mean to live as a free people. Jesus is challenged to consider what his ministry will be like. And, apparently it takes us 40 years to figure out who we will be. In the story of Ascension, the disciples have had time to be with Jesus in this new way. And now he's gone. So... now what? What will life be for them? How will they carry on? Will they go back to what they knew, or have they learned anything about a new way of living? Now who are they going to be?

This year's Ascension Day will challenge us with the same question: now what? Will this experience change who we are? How do we live together, with each other and the earth? What things are ultimately most important to us? Who do we recognize as heroes in our community? How do we spend our time together? Now what? Has life changed for us? Have we been given the chance to refocus as well as recharge?

During these past two months, we have all - in one way or another - been touched by sickness, death, worry, fear... isolation, economic insecurity... but for the most part, it has been a fairly safe time. I know our pets have loved having us home! But the news we hear each day let's us know that this next phase will continue to be a challenge. While we feel that we're ready to get back to normal, there are still so many questions. And so, as people of faith, we say "now what?" The Ascension story ends with two angels joining the disciples as they stand there staring up into heaven. The angels watch and wait for a while, then ask "What are you doing?"

It's time. You've had time to remember who you are. You're ready. It's time to be the people you were called to be. This - as difficult as it might be - is what we were made for. All the hymns we sung, all the prayers we've shared... all reminders that God is with us, through all things, and will continue to be with us through all of this. So, get to it. Go look after each other.

Remember the hymn "Faith While Trees Are Still In Blossom" by Fred Kaan? If you have Voices United at home, it's number 643. Or google it. Noah built the ark before it started to rain. We have the tools to be who we need to be. Together.

Then, after you look at that song, check out one of my favourites... "O-oh child." "Someday we'll walk in the rays..." Well, give it a listen. Crank it up. Sing along. Dance. Dance as prayer. And know you are blessed and ready for anything.

Peace. Be well.

Rev. Steve