

At-Home Worship Resource from Hillside Christian Church, KC

For the week of March 15th, 2020

Dear friend,

The following homily was delivered online via Facebook Live and YouTube, by Rev. Beck on Sunday, March 15th from his home, during our in-person worship service suspension. We provide it here, along with the At-Home communion liturgy for your personal use for devotion and worship.

For links to future online worship experiences, visit our website:

<https://www.hillsidecc.com/home-resources.html>

-Rev. Andy Beck

Scripture Reading:

Mark 15:29-36 NRSV

²⁹ Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰ save yourself, and come down from the cross!” ³¹ In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. ³² Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

³³ When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ³⁴ At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” ³⁵ When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, “Listen, he is calling for Elijah.” ³⁶ And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.”

This is part of the story of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. AMEN.

PRAYER

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, O God, our rock and our redeemer. AMEN.

HOMILY

Just to address the main issue here, this strain of coronavirus causes a sickness called COVID-19. There are lots of coronaviruses, this one is particularly dangerous. This has led to “social distancing” as a practice of staying healthy. And for the first time in over 100 years, since the 1918 flu pandemic, churches in America are facing the need to suspend in-person gatherings.

For some, that may feel like abandonment. For some, that may feel like too early a decision, based on current local information. I understand that feeling. But what may seem like an overreaction now may in fact be the cumulative reason that spread of the illness slows. Perhaps overreaction now will save people later.

Jesus’ words on the cross – a cry as Mark puts it, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” might sound familiar to some of our own feelings in this time of isolation. Social distancing can feel a little like abandonment for some. Nursing homes and independent living centers have limited access to only medical personnel and staff. Such concentrations of people have shown to be possible hot-beds of the spread of COVID 19, and they are taking every precaution possible to protect folks. And as an unintended result, folks may develop a feeling of isolation and abandonment.

Jesus and the theme of abandonment are an interesting pair. Because in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus cries out not to be left alone, not to be forsaken (v. 34). That’s a difficult thing to hear coming from the mouth of Christ. Has he succumbed to his human nature? Has he given up on God’s provision?

I wonder how you’ve felt forsaken or abandoned. Isolation and illness can amplify those feelings. But I want you to know something. Jesus also says in Matthew 28:20, (the very last verse of that gospel) a word of hope. Jesus’ words to his disciples are, “and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Perhaps Jesus’ words from Mark, as he’s on the cross can represent his connection to human suffering, and our feelings of sorrow, loneliness and grief. And perhaps his words in Matthew, encouraging the disciples, can represent

God's promise to creation – that God will be. God will remain. God will sustain God's presence amid whatever we face.

The author of Deuteronomy puts it this way: "The LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you." (Deut. 31:6b)

So even in feelings of abandonment and isolation, in times where social distancing is encouraged – and for good reason – there is a good word out there, that God will not forsake us, and we should not abandon one another either. That through this challenging time of self-isolation, we're actively protecting more vulnerable friends and family members. We're sacrificing our own comforts so that medical facilities don't fill up with severely sick folks too quickly. This is a way of loving our neighbors.

I think this is in some ways, a connection to the practice of Lent – of living a little more humbly, of behaving with a little more charity towards others, and considering the value of people over personal desires.

I want to leave you with a thought, and I think it connects Jesus' anguish in Mark and Jesus' promise in Matthew: universality. Have faith that Jesus is universally the Suffering Savior and the ever-present Christ. **AMEN.**

Questions for consideration and discussion:

You may want to share in a phone conversation about these questions with someone. That would be an interesting way of fellowshiping and worshipping with another.

- 1) What do you think was in Jesus' mind when he said, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
- 2) Have you ever felt forsaken or abandoned? If so, what changed your perspective? How did you experience the Holy during that time?
- 3) In these days of social distancing, how are you recognizing Jesus' universality around you?

I want you to know that I am fervently praying for you, our community and our congregation. If you have any need that I can assist with, please contact me at my cell phone, 405-990-7482.

While in-person services are suspended, the ministry and outreach of Hillside Christian remains strong. We're offering online worship experiences and are already seeing an increase in viewership! Giving to Hillside Christian Church can continue through the mail, be dropped off at the church office, or via our secure online platform at www.hillsidecc.com/give.

Be well, share peace, and remember God's love.

-Rev. Andy Beck

Hillside Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Kansas City, MO

Communion Liturgy for At-Home Worship

This resource is written in the first person. Please adapt as needed for group setting.

As you enter the time and space of holy communion, gather the supplies you may need. This could include:

- Elements like bread and cup
 - Use what works for you, Jesus did
- A candle or some way to recognize light
 - Open a window shade
- Something sacred to you that you can use to reflect on in remembrance

Call To Communion

Jesus was no stranger to awkward situations;

And celebrating communion at home kind of feels strange.

Especially if it's just me/us.

But I am not alone.

I celebrate communion with siblings in faith the world over.

This meal symbolizes unity in Christ, and I am thankful.

Upon the loaf and upon the cup of the Lord, in letters which speak not to the eye, but to the heart of every disciple, is inscribed, "When this you see, remember me." Indeed, the Lord says to each disciple, when he receives the symbols into his hand, "This is my body broken for you." The loaf is thus constituted a representation of his body—first whole, then wounded for our sins. The cup is thus instituted a representation of his blood—once his life, but now poured out to cleanse us from our sins.

— Alexander Campbell, 19th-century Disciples forebear

Prayer

Loving Creator, in the midst of fear and anxiety about viruses and public health, you meet me in simple forms. Here, I'm reminded of your provision; not that I would only hope for miracles, but that in your grace, you call me to prepare and provide. Because I'm made in your image, and you have provided, so I can also provide. That these elements would be for me a reminder of Jesus and his way of living, God I ask your blessing. AMEN.

Scripture 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 NRSV

[Please feel free to read from your bible if preferred]

- The Institution of the Lord's Supper

23 For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for[a] you. Do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

- Partake of the elements, remembering Jesus and his way of living.

Conclusion

Option to conclude your communion time with music that reminds you of God's love.