

EAST PLAINS UNITED CHURCH

For the Week of March 22, 2020

4th Week in Lent

*We are with each other even when
we aren't able to be gathered together for worship.
We are not alone.*

Prepare a quiet place in your home to spend a few minutes in prayer and reflection each day. Consider turning on some quiet music. On a computer browser, try: https://youtu.be/Dmj_AMV_xtM?t=15. Or: <https://www.convergencemp.com/find-songs/>

Light a Candle or use an electric candle if flames are not allowed where you live.

Prayer for this week:

Holy One, we can identify with the struggles of our ancestors in faith, the ancient Israelites, as they wandered in the desert after escaping from Egypt.

In this new desert in which we find ourselves, living in social isolation to try to stop the spread of a new plague, we pray for ourselves and for each other.

Today, we re-dedicate our hearts to you and strain our ears to hear your voice. Speak now, Still-Speaking God, for your people are listening! Amen

Scripture Readings—Consider reading one of these passages each day. If one particularly speaks to you, use it for several days.

Prayer before Scripture: As we read familiar words this day, startle us, O God, with their freshness. Open our hearts to receive your blessing. Amen

1 Samuel 16:1–13	Samuel chooses one of Jesse's sons as king.
Psalms 23	God is my shepherd.
Ephesians 5:8–14	Live as children of the light.
John 9:1–41	Jesus heals the man born blind.

A Reflection on Psalm 23 that Rev. Barb sometimes uses in funeral services, which feels pertinent for these times in which we find ourselves right now.

The Twenty-third Psalm is one of the most treasured passages in all of Scripture. Its timeless words are comforting at times like this, because even people who are not religious or very knowledgeable about the Bible recognize these words.

One of the images in this psalm which feels real right now is in the 4th verse: Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.

Psalm 23 is one of many places in the Bible that tell us that there will be difficult times in life. It does not say, “God will keep you from danger or grief.” It says, instead, that there will be times like right now, during the COVID19 pandemic, when we feel like we are walking through a “valley of the shadow of death.”

Here’s the thing: God does not send us through that valley with a cheery promise to meet us again on the other side. God goes with us every step of the way. The Word of God makes it clear that as we move through such times, God is with us. And God is with you now, in your anxiety, fears, and social isolation.

In the words of the United Church’s A New Creed: In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

Another thought inspired by Psalm 23 for this time or any time:



This sheep supposedly escaped a farm and spent six years in the mountains, during which time it grew 60 lb. of wool. Enemies that attacked it could not get their teeth through the wool. Moral of the story, if there is one: you can survive hard times by being very, very soft and fluffy rather than turning hard.

Ian Shorr 12 de marzo a las 14:53 · 🌐

Other things to think about in the readings for this week: (This Lent, we have been reflecting on edges and choices.)

“I am drawn to the passage from Ephesians because of its focus on light. The edge for me is the unhelpful contrast between darkness and light. A few years ago, I recorded a segment for Tapestry on CBC Radio that dispelled the myth of darkness as a bad thing. Many important things in the Hebrew Bible happen in the dark of night. As someone who resides north of the 60th parallel, where we

spend long periods of the year in significant darkness and long periods with significant amounts of daylight, it is important to draw "goodness" out of both darkness and light. This also leads to a natural connection to the gospel passage. What can we become aware of in the dark? What do we miss in the light? Take time to challenge the assumptions about light and dark made by Paul in the letter to the Ephesians and to name how this passage has been used to feed racism." *Peter Chynoweth, Yellowknife, N.W.T., in Gathering, Lent 2020.*

Pastoral Prayer (adapted)

by the Moderator of The United Church of Canada, The Right Rev. Richard Bott

In this time of COVID-19, we pray:

When we aren't sure, God, help us be calm;
when information comes from all sides, correct and not, help us to discern;
when fear makes it hard to breathe,
and anxiety seems to be the order of the day, slow us down, God;
help us to reach out with our hearts, when we can't touch with our hands;
help us to be socially connected, when we have to be socially distant;
help us to love as perfectly as we can,
knowing that "perfect love casts out all fear."

For the doctors and nurses, we pray,

for the technicians, the janitors, the aides and the caregivers, we pray,
for the researchers and theorists, the epidemiologists and investigators,
for those who are sick, and those who are grieving, we pray,

for all who are affected, all around the worldand especially for _____.
we pray for safety, for health, for wholeness.

May we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty,
clothe the naked and house those without homes;
may we walk with those who feel they are alone,
and may we do all that we can to heal the sick—
in this time of pandemic, in spite of the fear.

Help us, O God, that we might help each other.

In the love of the Creator,

in the name of the Healer,

in the life of the Holy Spirit that is in all and with all, we pray. May it be so. Amen

While the church is closed, we will send an e-bulletin each week and mail printed copies to those without internet. Meanwhile, stay in touch with others!

To talk with Rev. Barb or ask for prayers, please phone her cell phone: **416-540-8498** or email her: **revbarbarafullerton@gmail.com**.

If you are self-isolating and there is something with which we can help (deliver food, etc.), please leave a message at the church: 905-634-5562, **Line #2** or email: office@eastplainsunitedchurch.com.

Shared by Dr. Bob Panabaker:

When this is over,
may we never again
take for granted
A handshake with a stranger
Full shelves at the store
Conversations with neighbors
A crowded theatre
Friday night out
The taste of communion
A routine checkup
The school rush each morning
Coffee with a friend
The stadium roaring
Each deep breath
A boring Tuesday
Life itself.

When this ends,
may we find
that we have become
more like the people
we wanted to be
we were called to be
we hoped to be
and may we stay
that way—better
for each other
because of the worst.

LAURA KELLY FANUCCI