

Dear Friends,

I hope all of you are doing well, and by ‘doing well’ I mean doing not much. Just staying home. It can be more than simply boring, I know. It can be numbing and depressing. Even if we didn’t get out that much before, *having* to stay home is a whole different thing than choosing to do so. In the news, people from random college students on spring break to influential leaders of states and nations are spurning the advice of doctors and scientists who tell us that staying home is the best way to “flatten the curve” of the coronavirus. The cold reality is that the more people move around, the more carriers we’ll encounter, and the more the sickness will spread. That means a longer and longer time for us to be apart. So please be smart and safe, even if that means being lonely for a while.

The Emergency Response Team will meet this afternoon, and the session will meet tonight (both meetings by video conferencing). We will all be working on ways to keep the congregation connected.

Having said that staying home is the best practice, there are still some ministries that must continue and that need the physical presence of the right people to carry them out. The folks who have been taking meals to the Day Reporting Center (DRC) are packing up bag lunches rather than cooking hot meals for the men and women receiving that service. Thanks to all who are continuing that vital ministry!

Another ministry that is becoming more crucial than ever is the JAMA Food Pantry. The board met yesterday with along with some key volunteers to discuss how we might expand our efforts to help meet the growing need for food as neighbors of ours lose jobs and income. Next week, the pantry will begin opening every Tuesday as well as Thursday. That means we’ll need twice the volunteers. Not only that, we’ll need some new volunteers just to cover JPC’s usual Thursdays because so many regulars are in high-risk categories. So, if you’re a bit younger, and healthy, please consider volunteering.

To help cover our usual fourth [and fifth] Thursdays, contact Bill Reese (423-202-2943) or Tim Winter (309-287-4560).

To volunteer for Tuesdays, or as needed, contact the Rev. Karen Lane at Jonesborough United Methodist Church (423-753-3942).

Some very good news: In all likelihood, JAMA will receive a significant financial gift from the state through local government to help us through the coming weeks and months. That is a great and wonderful gift. *Thank you, Tennessee!* HOWEVER, there is a truly disheartening problem.

Money is useless if there is nothing to buy, and the shelves in grocery stores are all but empty of the kinds of items JAMA needs.

Unfortunately, nothing brings out selfishness in people like fear, and that fear has driven many people have bought far more than they need. I understand that—to a point. Our food supply is not in danger. Our sense of community is. *Please*, if you have some extra canned goods, extra bags of rice or dried beans, or a sack of flour you can spare, bring them to the church between 9am-12pm Monday-Wednesday. I'll open the fellowship hall door for you to put them in the bins.

Finally, I offer you a prayer by Walter Brueggeman. Dr. Brueggemann has written several books of prayers. Some he prayed and wrote in response to significant events in the world. Some he prayed and wrote in preparation for reading biblical texts or as his reflections after reading them. While the prayer below is a reflection on a reading of Micah, I offer it to you as a reflection on Paul's words to the Romans.

God's peace be with all of you,
Allen

¹⁸I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will

of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

²⁶Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (*Rom. 8:18-27 – NRSV*)

Waiting for Bread...and for God's Future

We are strange mixtures of loss and hope.
As we are able, we submit our losses to you.
We know about sickness and dying,
 about death and mortality,
 about failure and disappointment.
And now for a moment we do our
 failing and our dying in your presence,
 you who attend to us in loss.
As we are able, we submit our hopes to you.
We know about self-focused fantasy
 and notions of control.
But we also know that our futures
 are out beyond us,
 held in your good hand.
Our hopes are filled with promises of
 well-being, justice, and mercy.
Move us this day beyond our fears and anxieties

into your land of goodness.
We wait for your coming,
we pray for your kingdom.
In the meantime, give us bread for this day.
Amen.

Walter Brueggemann, *Prayers for a Privileged People*. Abingdon Press, 2008. P. 167.