

How are you feeling today? I'd like to know how you are really feeling.

Now, I'm at a bit of a disadvantage ... for I know some of you well, quite well ... and some of you I don't know at all.

I know the parishioners from St Michael's, Lansing because I am their rector. I've met one or two of you from St Paul's yet not the vast majority. I know your priest, Sarah. And I know your field ed student, Melissa ... because she was raised up from St Michael's. That's why ... in part ... we've joined services today. To celebrate Melissa.

Yet ... as we start our service today ... as we heard these stories from Holy Scripture, God's holy Word ... I'm wondering ... I want to know ... how are you feeling today? How are you doing?

I saw a chart the other day that relates to how we psychologically and emotionally deal with traumatic events. Events like the Covid-19 pandemic.

There is an immediate bump in a response ... flight or flight. Confusion. What will we do? Do

we have church? How can we continue our ministries? What about that greatest sacrament ... coffee hour?

Then for many there is this excitement spike. We rise to the occasion. We become heroic. We respond. We create call lists. We take groceries to each other. We pray ... we pray ... we pray. And we figure out technology so we can retain some semblance of community.

That phase segues to fear. Where we begin to really confront all the true challenges we face. The vestry meets. We name all those who are really hurting .. and the list is long. We look critically at our finances. We make the rough decisions about how to be church in these times.

So, first confusion. Then a jump in excitement, resilience and heroism. All this giving way to a surge in fear.

Then finally ... finally ... a long period of mourning and grief. A pondering: is this the new normal?

Mourning and grief are couched in a framework of:

- Dwelling on what is lost;
- Discerning what remains;
- Anticipating what is ahead.

We lament what we've lost. We seek out that which we can retain. We explore what is next.

Let's return to our gospel lesson for today. For I think this reading from the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of John can be a guidepost for us ... today. Today as we sit in a long, long period of mourning and grief.

Jesus says, *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth,"*

Let's step back a moment and really put this into context. Let us step into the world of Jesus. Let us stand among the friends of Jesus ... those disciples to whom these words were directed.

We have just left the dinner table. It was a startling dinner. Very confusing. It started with Jesus ... Jesus! ... washing our feet! Jesus, himself, got on his knees, washed our feet. Dried them with a towel

tied around his waist. Each of us. Jesus washed each of our feet.

Then toward the end of the meal, Jesus confronted us ... well, one of us. Jesus said one of us would betray him.

We asked Jesus who? He told us. Jesus said it would be Judas. We were puzzled ... for Jesus had even washed the feet of Judas.

And if this act of love (in the midst of betrayal) wasn't enough for us to get into our thick skulls, Jesus shared a teaching ... another teaching. Jesus was always teaching.

*"I give you a new commandment that you love one another ... everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

My friends, do you have the capacity to be in the room ... to be in the room with Jesus? Are you at table? Are your feet clean? Are your hearts confused? Are you willing to hear that Jesus will be betrayed and put to death? Are you left with the lesson to love?

It must have been a traumatic moment. It was getting real. The pressure in Jerusalem was great. Jesus and his friends were confronted both by the empire and the religious authorities. What was to be a victorious entrance to the great city and temple was now fraught with danger.

Real danger. Like death. Like betrayal. Sort-of like the threat of Covid-19.

My friends, for me the gift of the Church and the gift of celebrating our liturgical year, is that we are reminded of these stories again and again and again.

Death was real. The death of Jesus was real. The lost. The confusion. The grief. The mourning. All of this was real.

Of course ... we anticipate the resurrection. We get new life. We get hope. We get restoration.

And, thanks be to God – we have lived this Pascal mystery ... the cycle of Holy Week and Easter ... all during the pandemic. We have had direct reminders of

persecution, judgement, betrayal, death and resurrection.

Yet I still wonder, how are you feeling? Does a reminder of our Christian witness and hope take away your loss, your grief? Is it a little too pat? A little too trite.

Hug the risen Christ today and you'll feel okay!

Really?!?

My guess is that we might accept this story, this morning, in our head space 'cause we're good, well-intentioned loving people.

Yet later tonight ... or tomorrow morning ... when we eat dry cereal because we're run out of milk ... when we go to our cobbled together home office and get on the computer to "talk" to our work mates ... or worse yet, when we stay in bed, furloughed from our job ... head under the covers ... to avoid the whines of the children who don't want to do one more craft project and would rather play with friends or (gasp!) even go to school ... or when we are alone (alone) ... no one around. No one.

When we confront the daily reality of wearing masks, washing our hands over and over and over again ... what consolation is the Easter story?

If there is a risen Christ, we can't even hug him! So what good is he?

We mourn. We're in for a long period of grief and mourning ... reconciling the trauma and integration to a new life is a long, long ways away.

We look to what we've lost. We examine what is retained. We imagine some future.

We've lost so much: school, jobs, health, freedom, hobbies, graduations. We've lost social activities. We've lost being together in church. Some of us have lost our life ... or we live knowing that others have died.

We take some consolation in that we can remain connected to our workplace, our school, our family and friends, our church through technology. Or even the old-fashioned way ... in phone calls and letters.

We can hold onto the prayers. Even in our physical distance, we have the prayers ... communal prayers to a God who listens.

What about the future?

Well, Jesus was talking earlier. Remember. The glory of the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of John is the gift of Jesus leading us into the future. Not the resurrection part. Jesus does talk about his resurrection in all of the gospels – particularly in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

What is unique about the gospel of John is that Jesus tells us about a future that is our future. A consolation for us today ... not just for his disciples. Jesus is directly talking to us today:

*"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever... 'I will not leave you orphaned;'"*

Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the Comforter, the Advocate, the Spirit of truth will be with us always ... always.

Friends, we are in a time of deep mourning and grief. You're your

time. Review what is lost.  
Celebrate what is retained. Pray for  
a future. And know that the Holy  
Spirit is along side each of us as we  
grieve.

The Spirit will guide and console  
us. Even in our deepest, darkest  
depths of fear. And the Spirit of  
truth will lead us into a new way of  
life ... a way of life reflecting  
God's reassuring love for all of  
God's creation and creatures.

This is the Good News promised us  
by Jesus ... as Jesus speaks to us  
*today!*

**Amen.**