

A SPECIAL FEATURE FROM **PASTOR LAWRENCE AND PASTOR MARC**

“Honestly hadn’t planned on giving up quite this much for Lent.”

That was a recent tweet by theologian Andy Crouch on March 13th. It’s a pretty funny joke (as tweets go), but like many great jokes there’s a kernel of truth underneath it. This is not the Lent that we had imagined. Over the past few weeks, we’ve been asking a lot of questions about this “new normal” in the time of Coronavirus. How long will this last? How long do we have to “quarantine?” Where can I find toilet paper? What’s going to happen with that family trip we had planned? With that wedding? With Easter?

Many of the questions seem to be variations of a deeper question underneath them all: “What does this all mean?”

We don’t think any of us can really know for sure what the answers to all of those questions are. Life in the time of Coronavirus is a wilderness time. The season of Lent, in many ways, is symbolic of the wilderness. As we move together through this forty day liturgical season, we are reminded of the forty days that Jesus spent in the wilderness. During this time he was cut off. Isolated from friends and family. Limited access to food (if any). Maybe even a little bit tempted by the devil.

A few years ago, the Old Testament theologian Walter Brueggemann once told Marc that intentional times of spiritual discipline (such as Lent or Sabbath for that matter) are not supposed to be convenient. They are intended to disrupt and break our ordinary patterns of behavior. We do not believe that God caused this Coronavirus, nor do we believe that this pandemic is God’s will. However, we do believe that even in the midst of pandemic, we (as people of faith) can find new opportunities to draw closer to one another and to ultimately draw closer to God.

This is a very different season of Lent. We honestly had not planned on giving up quite this much. We had not planned on giving up seeing our friends. Going to restaurants. Getting coffee with campus students. Enjoying our fellowship with one another. We had not planned on giving up worshiping in traditional ways with our beloved community.

At the same time, we are also amazed at the ways that we have seen faithfulness breaking through. As we scroll through Oxford Talk on Facebook, we have been inspired by the stories of teachers organizing to deliver meals to their students. Employees at grocery stores working overtime to help make sure

people have what they need. Doctors, nurses, and caregivers going the extra mile to care for the sick. We hadn't planned on giving up this much...but we had also not planned on seeing a community come together this closely and perhaps (in our own way) drawing closer to God together. John's gospel offers a record of one disciple who drew closer to the Lord.

The extraordinary account begins in John chapter 13 as Jesus gathered to celebrate the festival of Passover with his disciples. Modeling service and humility, Jesus washed the disciples' feet. During this season of the COVID-19, when we send that letter, or deliver those groceries, make that phone call, or share these stories in our community, we mimic Jesus' act of humble love and servanthood for one another.

Recalling the great story of salvation and deliverance from slavery, they shared the Passover meal. Following the meal, the disciples settled down for one of Jesus' teachings. Little did the disciples know that it would be Jesus last - and among his greatest teachings.

Let's zoom in on one disciple as recorded in verse 23. Early Christian interpretation offered that St. John was the disciple who leaned against Jesus. As Jesus taught, John heard the heartbeat of God.

How is Jesus inviting - calling - you to lean in and listen to the heartbeat of God during this most unexpected season?

With worship services live streamed for the foreseeable future, how will you prepare for a Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and Easter unlike any you've probably known before or will ever experience again?

Intentional acts of mission? Contemplative walks in nature? Reading through a gospel? Keeping a journal? Praying with a friend through a video call?

How will we recognize the empty tomb? How will we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?

Let us be the church of new life!

Let us lean in to joyfully rediscover God's heartbeat at the heart of our own lives and in all creation!