

Our daughter, Marie, lives in Florida. Her mother and I are not too pleased with that. Every day I follow the chart in the New York Times that shows the states with the highest amount of COVID-19 cases. Florida is always there.

The good news is she came to stay with us for three weeks (I still live in North Carolina because of the limitations of being with people because of COVID-19). Marie is 31 and works remotely, so it doesn't matter where she is. Her mother and I haven't had this much prolonged contact with her in a decade. While yes, we did have a few tense moments and yes, I discovered we don't like to watch the same television programs (every night she asked why we watch the PBS NewsHour), but I found that part of me was more relaxed. I knew one of my two children was safe.

Saturday morning – two days ago – she left. "Be careful," her mother and I said like a mantra. Now as the house is quieter and my wife, Jo, and I are back in our routines, I find I am back in that in-between place – to care and not to care.

The letting go, the becoming open to what life brings, is not limited to parenthood. It's the root of discipleship. We all are letting go of the summer we thought we would have. We are letting go of the sense of calm we used to have and in turn are learning to embrace a diligence that, over the long haul, is exhausting. We are letting go of the illusion that as a nation we have dealt with our embedded racism and therefore have to face some hard realities that are difficult to acknowledge, much less to transform.

This period isn't going to fade away quickly. Therefore, instead of holding our breath or being perpetually frustrated or distracted, let us remember that regardless of the conditions, "This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it." If we are to experience the presence of God, it will only be on the day we are actually alive and not some far away peaceful time.

Because I knew my time with Marie was short and because I was displaced from my old routines of staying preoccupied, for some periods I was able to be fully present and give thanks in the moment. I didn't hammer my daughter with my usual grilling – "Eating well?" "Saving money?" "Being safe?" I was just glad to see her and embrace her. I was glad for the time I could see her face to face instead of through a screen.

During the Eucharist, we hear the celebrant say, "Do this for the remembrance of me," but the Holy Communion is not the only vehicle for divine remembering. In Christ we live in a sacramental universe. Yes, the consecrated bread and wine are holy, but God's grace can't be limited to those. Let's remember, one of Thomas Merton's deepest experiences of the Holy was crossing the street in Louisville, Kentucky on the way to the dentist. If God is God, then the divine presence is everywhere if we will be present for it.

Here's the thing. I know we miss the Eucharist, but in this meantime, let us be open to God's grace in our very lives. The truth is we live in a sacramental world. As we read last Sunday in the Genesis passage, Jacob is in the middle of nowhere. "A certain place" is the term given, yet the passage ends with him saying, "this is the gate of heaven." Because we live in a sacramental universe, the gate of heaven is everywhere.

Let us be careful about COVID-19, and let us engage the racism that continues to infect our country, but let us not believe that God is absent from us because of our country's condition or because of our need to maintain physical distance from one another or because we don't have "normal" church services. The Holy Spirit is beyond time and space.

We must not hold our breath, or white knuckle it during this time. Paula D'Arcy, says, "God comes disguised as your own life." Maybe in the shape of your daughter; maybe on your way to the dentist; maybe as you be still and know that God is God.

This is the only moment we have to be alive and be receptive to the Holy Spirit. Let us be open to those times when we are fully, completely connected to one another, to our true self and to God who is always connecting us.

Perhaps one of the few gifts of Covid 19 is that we have time to remember and to be remembered. May we use that time to be open to God's grace.