



WHERE THE DOORS OF THE CHUCH SWING OPEN ON THE HINGES OF LOVE AND PEACE

## The Pastor's Portion

April 19, 2020

Spiritual Nourishment for the Soul



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This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

It is interesting and perhaps serendipitous for today's scheduled scripture text to be about basic practices that are now distinctly taboo for our Coronavirus times: Jesus breathing directly on his disciples without a face mask, touching each other without gloves -- no social distancing here. From this text, we get a rich dialectic for our times. How do we integrate social distancing and a commitment to solitude as a necessary practice for healthy socialization? In both psychological and spiritual development, both are necessary for the good life and health. Is there a gift within

the crisis to facilitate a practice of strategic solitude and as an antidote to toxic society and culture? It is always a pleasure to be in community to contemplate and feast on the words of scripture and wisdom both old and new. God bless, God speed, and love!

Rev. Misha Thomas

Remember:

**LOVE ALWAYS WINS!**



**PLEASE JOIN US FOR VIRTUAL WORSHIP ON SUNDAY AT 11AM THROUGH ZOOM TECHNOLOGY ON YOUR COMPUTER OR THE PHONE.**

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/268033036?pwd=b1ZoeDFYSzdFV3A5M0hSNFpTamtVZz09>

Meeting ID: 268 033 036

Password: 170245

Dial In:  
+16465588656

Access code:268033036# US (New York)

**JOIN US FOR MID WEEK BIBLE STUDY ON WEDNESDAY AT 7PM**

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/506186798>

Meeting ID: 506 186 798

Dial: 16465588656, Access Code:

506186798# US (New York)

### Weekly Inspiration:

“Whatever may be the tensions and the stresses of a particular day, there is always lurking close at hand the trailing beauty of forgotten joy or unremembered peace.”

Howard Thurman

“Christianity is a lifestyle - a way of being in the world that is simple, non-violent, shared, and loving.

However, we made it into an established "religion" (and all that goes with that) and avoided the lifestyle change itself. One could be warlike, greedy, racist, selfish, and vain in most of Christian history, and still believe that Jesus is one's "personal Lord and Savior" . . . The world has no time for such silliness anymore. The suffering on Earth is too great.”

~RICHARD ROHR

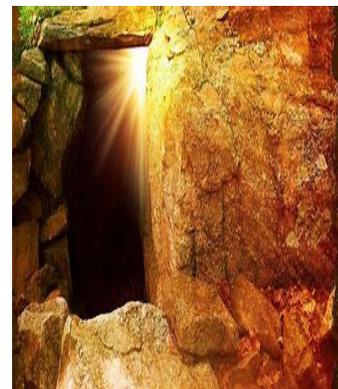
Thank you to Rev. Misha Thomas who spent some time with us after service discussing trauma informed care in the era of COVID. Your expertise informed by your own personal trauma brought our lived experiences to life in a powerful way. God bless your journey!

Special thanks to County Legislator Ruth Walter, Rev. David Gaewski (NY Conference Minister), Associate Conference Minister Shernell Edney Stilley, Hon. Juanita Bing Newton, Pamela Knox, Rev. Patrick Duggan (Church Building and Loan, Cong. Church of So. Hempstead) and MID Vanessa Pugh who joined us for worship today! We love you!

LET US PRAY: God today, let us make Love contagious, let us make compassion contagious, let kindness become contagious! Breathe on us Lord, so that we may receive the Holy Spirit and be enabled to live, love, serve and embrace all that is pure and true in this life.

Amaze us God with your power to spread love, your power to heal us of all that keeps us bound, release your power to free us from selfishness and self-centeredness. Help us God in these dangerous and perilous times.

Amen!



I AM CALLED  
to help the poor,  
the hungry, the thirsty,  
the hurting, the abused,  
the broken.

**Today's Sermon from Rev.  
Misha Thomas – Sunday 19  
April 2020 – Spiritual  
Contagion**

John 20:19-31 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)  
19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." 24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin[a]), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." 26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut,

Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may come to believe[b] that Jesus is the Messiah,[c] the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Within the context of today and Coronavirus, there is something very awkward and problematic about this text – Jesus and his disciples were not practicing anything close to social distancing: in each others face, breathing on each other, talking up close, putting fingers on other peoples hands and wounds, no gloves or protective equipment and no masks. And as awkward as this is - -this precise closeness, proximity, and task of giving the peace of God to one another is the very thing to which the text still calls us today, despite coronavirus –

and in many ways more so because of coronavirus.

But of course – there is a dilemma to discern. There is a paradox to resolve.

Within the current crisis of the Coronavirus, we come to see what has always been true about ourselves. In a sense, because of the current crisis of the Coronavirus we are forced to see what has always been true, but is too easily ignored under the familiar and common busyness and distraction of the illusion of normal.

We come to see that we are, at the core, social. And that being social, our connection and proximity to one another is simultaneously a thing of need and bliss – as well as a profound thing of danger. Like Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden, it is not good for us to be left alone. And, yet, it can be deadly unless we are left alone.

This is true. This has always been true. Amidst and betwixt this paradox unfolds the joys, the sorrows, and mystery of being human. Which is only really particularly pronounced within the current crisis of the Coronavirus. Crisis has a way of teaching us what is otherwise too easy to forget.

The lesson seemed to have come suddenly, cutting through the crust of our normal everyday lives – that is to say, the normal happy and silly crust of social anesthesia and dissociation. It comes by way of physical health, threatening our very existence, in the form of what in biology is called contagion.

The definitions of contagion:

(Webster online version)

Definition of contagion

1a: a contagious disease

b: the transmission of a disease by direct or indirect contact

c: a disease-producing agent (such as a virus)

2a: POISON

b: contagious influence, quality, or nature

c: corrupting influence or contact

3a: rapid communication of an influence (such as a doctrine or emotional state)

b: an influence that spreads rapidly

The crisis of Coronavirus calls out for effective public health. The wisdom of public health, in short, is that we must prevent the spread of the virus by committing to a strategic time of social distancing and even isolation. Since the virus depends upon the fact of our social mechanism, we must be willing to adjust our social functioning for both survival and health.

And so it is spiritually as well. Our spiritual well-being, indeed our very psychological and cultural health is established upon the fact and functioning of us being social creatures. Our very psychological and spiritual development is the result of our exposure to one another.

We are shaped by the exposure to parenting in childhood (for good and for bad). We are shaped by the exposure to the cub-wrestling-developmental play of childhood sibling affiliation and rivalry. We are exposed in adolescence to the jabs and jeers of playground teasing or fawning. And in our further coming of age, the intricate and complex exposure to social systems and culture – or the lack thereof – get breathed deeply into the system of our own individual psychological and spiritual character (or lack thereof). We are, in a sense, who we are because of our close proximity and exposure to one another. This is at once a necessity and a good. And it is at once a very risky and dangerous arrangement.

My negativity catches quickly and becomes your negativity. (The story in the cab of me arguing with my ex as an example of negative social contagion.)

But the opposite is also true. (The story of my happily saying good morning to the bus driver as social contagion of gladness.)

In the text, we are called to give peace to one another. We are called to be close enough, in each other's faces breathing the peace of God to one another. But we can only do this with enough solitude that ensures we are safe, healthy, and transmitting love, kindness, compassion, and the kind of feedback and social support and visibility that helps the other person be healthy.

How this happens in normal development is how it must happen spiritually: The good life requires a balanced focus and oscillation between robust social encounters and strategic and definite time alone, away from it all to ensure and integrate what we gain from healthy social encounter.

Moses had his social shutdown on the backside of the mountain for about 40 years. Jesus had his shutdown in the wilderness alone for 40 days. We are approaching our own shutdown now for well over a month. What are we doing with it? Are we taking opportunity to practice being healthy on our own, practice being kind, caring, thoughtful, reflective on our own – for the sake of contributing this when

we are back in the faces of other people. So that it is safe, not just physically, but that it is also transmitting healthy psychological and spiritual peace, which leans toward social vibrancy and culture – rather than negativity, fear, tribalism, and hurts.