



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

# The Pastor's Portion

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Spiritual Nourishment for the Soul



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## HOLY WEEK IS UPON US

God woke me up at 3 am with this question:  
Why are you looking for the living among the dead?

During this week, I implore you to look at what is DEAD IN YOUR LIVES. ARE YOU LOOKING FOR LIFE AMONG DEAD THINGS AND PEOPLE?

ARE OUR CHURCHES DEAD AND IRRELEVANT IN THIS CURRENT ERA? If so, how can we resurrect it so that it indeed has life and meaning and the purpose that Jesus intends?

Remember that Jesus had to go into the pit of hell. Ephesians 4:9-10 tells us that Christ had to descend to the pit of hell to ascend to the heights of heaven. On Saturday, remain silent and pray that we can resurrect dead institutions, including the church, to be more loving and just expressions of a loving and just God.

WASH YOUR HANDS! STAY INSIDE! PRAY AND REST. BE STRONG AND VERY COURAGEOUS!



### Weekly Laughter:

Just be careful because people are losing it from being in lock down! Actually, I've just been talking about this with the microwave and toaster while drinking coffee and we all agreed that things are getting bad. I didn't mention anything to the washing machine as she puts a different spin on everything. Certainly not to the fridge as he is acting cold and distant. In the end the iron straightened me out as she said everything will be fine, no situation is too pressing. The vacuum was very unsympathetic... told me to just suck it up, but the

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

One tap mobile

+16465588656 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

One tap mobile

+16465588656,,506186798# US (New York)

fan was more optimistic and hoped it would all soon blow over! The toilet looked a bit flushed when I asked its opinion and didn't say anything but the door knob told me to get a grip. 🤖 The front door said I was unhinged and so the curtains told me to .....yes, you guessed it 🤖 .....pull myself together. Anonymous FB post

### Weekly Inspiration:

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a twentieth-century Jesuit philosopher, prayed:

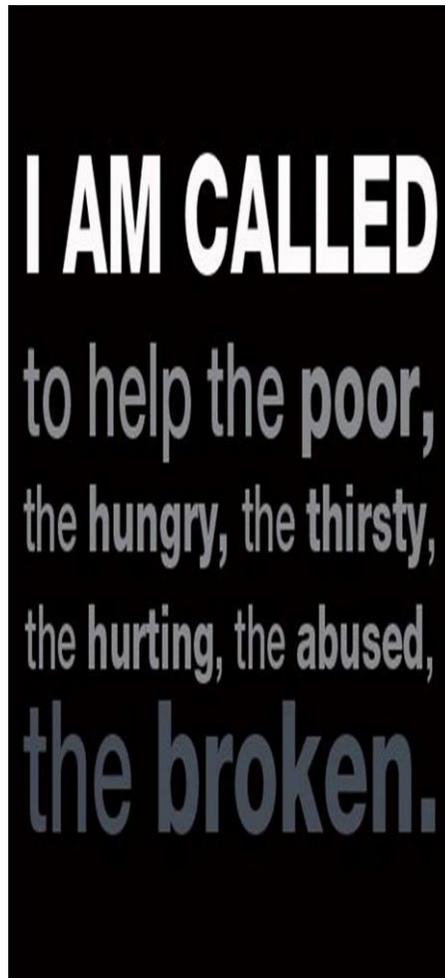
"Since once again, Lord, I have neither bread nor wine nor altar, I will raise myself beyond these symbols, up to the pure majesty of the real itself; I, your priest, will make the whole earth my altar and on it will offer you all the labors and suffering of the world."

Lord God, we give you thanks that no building can house you fully and no place of worship can contain your majesty. Teach us by our deeds of peace and justice and joyful celebration to erect altars in the world, so that when some other soul comes across them, they will see that you are indeed present everywhere. Amen.

~ "Common Prayer: a liturgy for ordinary radicals"

### Weekly Cry for Justice:

Coronavirus doesn't discriminate against anyone –rich or poor, young or old, powerful or disempowered. Lockdowns, social distancing, work from home, washing hands, etc., are prescribed to slow the spread, with the assumption that all have the possibilities to comply. **Not so for many in the world with scarce access to water, sanitation and healthcare. Although coronavirus doesn't discriminate, social injustice does.** Deenabandhu Manchala for the National UCC news.



LET US PRAY: God, we thank you for your loving kindness and for the multitude of your tender mercies. We thank you for health and strength, we thank you that things are as well as they are. We thank you that you have given us the gift and anointing of hope and strength so that we may navigate these unchartered and sometimes perilous times that we are living in. You are the God that heals us. We ask that you will give us the courage, strength and grace to move through and to what is your perfect will for our lives. WE PRAY for those who are sick in their bodies and perhaps in their spirits, we pray for those whose hope has been dashed, those that are afraid, those that are terrified in this present time. Help us to realize that you hold all of our lives in your hands, that you hold our breath and that you hold our present and our future. We ask you to bless and heal in the hospitals, in this quarantine reality, bless people in their homes, those that are desperately afraid because they have symptoms and they can't get tested, those who are angry with the response of our government, and those who already had compromised immune systems. We ask oh God that you would whisper words of comfort to people everywhere. Bless and anoint us for such a time as this. We were not born in this time by happenstance. We were born in this time by your perfect will; and so, empower us to make a positive impact on this time. We trust you to do it, we have believed you for so many things, and so we believe you for this. And we count it done in the name of Jesus and by your power. Amen

## **MISTAKEN IDENTITY\***

Imagine the scene: Jerusalem is crowded for the Passover time. Jesus and his disciples are preparing to enter the city. Centuries earlier, the prophet Zechariah had described for the residents of Jerusalem a king who would come and bring peace. He had said that they would recognize this savior because he would come “humble and riding on a donkey — on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” This image had been taught to the children in their religious training.

The crowds in Jerusalem that day had this image in mind. They were suffering hard times living under Roman rule. They wanted a king just like their hero King David. Things had never been as good as they were when David had been their king. David was remembered with much nostalgia for the good old days. So they were looking for someone to come and do again for them what David had done. Despite what their scriptures said, despite what Zechariah prophesied to them, they were expecting and hoping for a King with the kind of might and popularity of David.

When Jesus enters the city, he sends a message to the people about his identity. He arranges for a donkey on which to ride into town. The people get the “king” part. They respond with a festival and singing Hosanna, by which they mean “fix things for us, get rid of these occupying Romans, make us like the proper kingdom of proud and happy people we once were.” They greeted him as they would have greeted King David.

But Kings and conquerors, like those in the Roman Empire normally come riding on horses, with a fleet of military men with weapons and might alongside of them—they come on big white

horses and they are armed to the teeth with the weapons of their warfare. Their power is obtained and sustained by fear and by force. They revel in the power and the prestige and the “perks” of the office. They expect to be treated to the best as they rule by force and by fear.

Kings love power. But Jesus’ power is love. His power isn’t a matter of controlling force, but of eternal love. Psalm 118: 1-2 describes that love as steadfast and enduring forever. He comes to “open the gates of righteousness” and “to give light.” As Zechariah foretold, this messiah comes not to control the world, but to care for it.

The crowd discovered that their “king” was not going to give them what they expected. The very next story in Matthew’s gospel pictures Jesus going into the temple and driving out people who were buying and selling there. He calls these people “thieves” and defends the temple as a “house of prayer.” The rest of the time he is in town, he heals blind and crippled people. The crowds get the picture that this man is not the kind of king they had expected. Jesus soon encountered not a celebratory, welcoming group but an angry mob demanding that he be crucified.

This should tell us something powerful right there! Don’t become seduced by the praises of people. This scene tells us that God fearing leaders will never become seduced by praise, nor afraid when people turn on them, when the people discover that theirs is not the kind of leader the world offers, but rather the one that God has ordained and anointed. Jesus was not seduced by the praise, nor was he afraid of the criticism of the people. He had a mission, he had an assignment, and he had a destiny that was ordained

by God, and only God. Jesus was driven by the love of God, the love that enabled him to engage in radical and self-sacrificing ministry.

As Jesus marched towards his death on a cross, he demonstrated a fearless love that showed whose side he was on. Unconcerned with the religious authorities, or the government officials, Jesus marched into the temple and chased out those who would use God’s house for profit, as a market place, as a show piece! He called it a den of thieves, rather than what it was intended—as a house of prayer.

This scene should serve as a warning to us as we are in this global pandemic! Look at what is happening. All across the world, beautiful buildings called churches are sitting vacant. Gorgeous structures, awe inspiring architecture with gorgeous stained-glass windows are empty. Church bells remain un-rung, the buildings are empty and all as we enter into the holiest of seasons in the Christian calendar. But the Church should be deployed!

If this is not God showing us what God really cares about, I don’t know what else will do it! This pandemic should remind us that the only thing that matters to God is LOVE and SERVICE. Period. Full stop.

How many people have to die, how many lives have to be unwittingly sacrificed before we come to understand that we have placed value on all the wrong things!

We placed value on buildings, we placed value on money, we placed value on prestige and power, we placed value on things that will disappear in a moment, and we neglected the will and the word--and the relationship and the reality of God!

This is the week in which we are walking with Jesus to the cross. In humility, Jesus gave up his heavenly status and came to us in human form to show us how to live, to show us how to love, to show us how to be fully human with all the Divine potential inside of us. And what do we do? We squander our Divine potential by majoring in minor things such as money and power and prestige. Wake up! Read the warning signs.

What we are seeing in this world right now is the rise of a different kind of king, the rise of a new ethic. What we are witnessing is the powerlessness of the President, the powerlessness of the doctors, and the health care system, the powerlessness of wall street, the powerlessness of capitalism and corporate greed. We are witnessing the Power of God to move in the hearts and minds of people, the power of love to respond to a global crisis, the power of community to band together and help one another, the power of ingenuity, and private effort, and the power of discipline of staying behind doors to slow the curve and pray. If we engage in prayer, and really get still and seek God, we will witness the power of prayer.

**This is an opportunity to demonstrate not the majesty of our buildings, but the power of prayer and the majesty of our God.** This is the time to show that Christ is King, that God is still on the throne. It is a time to embrace a different kind of king. It is time to welcome Jesus as the real King in our lives and in our church. For too long, the church universal has been impotent, concerning itself with a kind of luke warm wishy washy faith, coming to church singing songs, hearing an irrelevant message,

having coffee and then going home unchanged, unmoved, uncommitted and uninterested in living out the gospel message of love and service. And this is going on all across the nation, and indeed the world. The church has majored in minors and we have missed the point and the power of God. God is waiting for you and waiting for the church to stand up and be the church. Will you do it? Will we do it?

\*Sermon derived in part from Sermon Seeds site at [www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org)

### **Let us pray!**

Help us oh God! Help us to be strong and very courageous. Help us to see what is really important. Help us to live into your call on our lives to live for love and service to others. Help us in this time, to look not to our own selfish needs and ambitions, but to think first of the needs of others. Let the mind that was in Jesus be in us, Let us be like Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but he emptied himself, taking on the form of a slave, being born in human likeness, and being found in human form, Jesus humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even the most brutal form of death—death on a cross.

Let us not be afraid to die, let us not be afraid to suffer for the sake of others. Let us empty ourselves for the sake of others. Let us bow our knee to Jesus, let us confess with our tongues that Jesus is Lord, to the Glory of God, Father and Mother of us all.