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Call to Worship

When we began our Lenten series six weeks ago with the theme of “Busy,” we included this rocking chair as a visual image to remind us to take time to slow down and rest. The past few weeks our focus has shifted as the coronavirus impacted our lives, for now our routines have changed.

For some, being at home may have created more space for rest, while others may have found themselves busier as they strive to learn new ways of working at a distance.

Those who were already homebound may have experienced little change in their lives, but maybe this time has created an opportunity for all of us be sensitive to those who have lived this homebound style of living for many years.

Whether you are busy, not so busy, or still disoriented with your view of time, we welcome you into this time of worship.

Prayer

Comforting God, we come into this place waving palm branches in celebration of Jesus’ entry into not only the city of Jerusalem 2000 years ago, but into our lives each day. You come to us at each moment, offering us life and wholeness, even in this new time of social distancing and feelings of isolation. Even though we have had to distance ourselves from one another, you are never far from us. You are as close to us as each breath we take.

Our prayers reach out to embrace those who long for hope during this time of separation.

- For those in nursing homes who long for visits from families...
- For restless children who now remain at home and no longer have the routine of school, and especially for those who are to graduate this year and will not be able to walk across the stage...
- For those who supply food in restaurant or grocery stores, we give you thanks for their working at stocking shelves and delivering food...

Exodus 20:8-11

⁸Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work. ¹⁰But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. ¹¹For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Mark 11:1-10

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ²and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. ³If anyone

says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’”⁴ They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it,⁵ some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?”⁶ They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it.⁷ Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it.⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields.⁹ Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

Reflection

I’m the opposite of procrastination. I love to plan ahead, always looking at what’s on the horizon, trying to discern how to be prepared. For example, I plan themes for worship months in advance, providing plenty of time for our musicians to search for music that ties into the service. I had plans for our church all lined out for Lent, but most of those I had to set aside.

I think my passion for planning ahead gives me a sense of control, a sense of predictability, but the past few weeks I have thrown much of my planning out the window in the suddenness of change we

have all experienced. It’s as though life has said to us, “Give it a rest!” I’ve had to try new things for our worship, such as where to sit or stand and how to livestream.

Lately I’ve heard the echo of God’s suggestion to give it a rest from one of the Ten Commandments—the importance of Sabbath, a Hebrew word meaning “to rest” or “to cease.” In other words: just STOP!

Writer Wayne Muller wrote in this book entitled *Sabbath*, that “we have lost the rhythm between work and rest.” He reminds us that we need a balance between our waking activities and our sleep, just as there is a pattern in the change from winter to spring. He writes, “Our culture...supposes that action and accomplishment are better than rest, that doing something—anything—is better than doing nothing...Because we do not rest, we lose our way.”¹

In this time when we’re told to stay home, some of us may have felt we’ve lost our way. It goes against our natural inclination to go somewhere, anywhere. Maybe this time is an opportunity to stop. To rest. Or as Psalm 46 reminds us, “Be still, and know that I am God.”

I don’t believe that God has sent this coronavirus to us, for God is one who brings goodness to the world in the midst of chaos. But I do see this virus as an opportunity to learn something new.

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- Maybe some of us will learn how to take time to slow down and rest, to practice how to honor the Sabbath.
- Maybe some of us will become more conscious of those who are homebound who often long for visitors or phone calls.
- Maybe some of us will learn how to take only what we need while leaving enough for others to live.
- Maybe some of us will learn how to communicate better with one another using computers, telephones, or even writing notes. Imagine that—learning how to write cards and letters again with pens, paper, and stamps!

The palm branches we waved this morning remind me how Jesus was hoping the crowd would learn something new in the midst of their chaos. The people were tired of the oppression of the Roman government and the soldiers. Many may have felt tempted to fight back in a revolt, and yet, Jesus came into town riding on a humble donkey, not on a warhorse as military leaders had done in that town many times before. Jesus didn't come with an army and swords, but with 12 disciples who had spent time listening to his teachings about caring for others.

Jesus was confronting the powers of his day and telling them, "Give it a rest. Pay attention to those in need. Hear the cries of the oppressed. I bring them hope."

Give It a Rest!
April 5, 2020

Rev. Dr. Douglas Cripe
Central Christian Church, Elkhart & First Christian Church, Mishawaka

The crowd responded to his entry into town by waving palm branches, a symbol often used to celebrate the entrance of king, creating a green carpet on the ground, a bit like our practice of laying out the red carpet for someone important.

Even though we cannot all gather to spread out the green carpet in our church to welcome Jesus this Palm Sunday, I have heard other stories of how kind-hearted people are still offering a welcoming spirit. Professional runner Rebecca Mehra from Oregon tweeted that she noticed an elderly couple sitting in their car in a grocery store parking lot.

"I went to the grocery store this afternoon. As I was walking in, I heard a woman yell to me from her car."

"I walked over and found an elderly woman and her husband. She cracked her window open a bit more, and explained to me nearly in tears that they are afraid to go in the store."

Mehra said the woman explained that she and her husband are in their 80s "and hear that the novel coronavirus is affecting older people disproportionately and that they don't have family around to help them out."

That's when the elderly woman handed Mehra a \$100 bill and a grocery list.

Mehra explained the woman "asked if I would be willing to buy her groceries."

"I bought the groceries and placed them in her trunk, and gave her back the change. She

Exodus 20:8-11; Mark 11:1-10

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told me she had been sitting in the car for nearly 45 min before I had arrived, waiting to ask the right person for help.”²

In addition to keeping ourselves safe during this crisis, it’s tempting to let fear overtake our sense of caring for one another. When faced with fear, give it a rest, wave your palms, and know that you are the right person as you find safe ways to continue offering hope.

¹ Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*,” p. 1.

² <https://people.com/human-interest/oregon-woman-helps-elderly-couple-scared-grocery-store-coronavirus-pandemic/>