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Call to Worship

This seems like a strange way to gather, with me here and many of you gathered in your living rooms.

You may be watching live, or maybe you're watch at a later time.

Either way, I invite you into a spirit of worship, celebrating that although we are apart, we are gathered together as one body in Christ who unites us all across the spans of time and distance.

Prayer

God beyond time and place, we bring our fears and our prayers to you. In our fast-moving and hectic world, we often pray for a slower pace and less crowded schedules, but we never imagined our lives would come to a stop, halted by a tiny virus that only lives if passed from one to another. In this time of being separate, in this time of feeling isolated, in this time of slowing down, may we take these days to draw closer to you. May we find innovative ways of connecting safely to one another.

We bring our prayers to you as we name our friends and family, those who may be near or those far away....

We pray for those who work each day to provide health care and food and other needed services...

We pray for those who have become ill and for families who have lost loved ones...

We offer all our prayers to you...

We know you hear us through Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Luke 12:22-31

²² Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Therefore, I say to you, don't worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ There is more to life than food and more to the body than clothing. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: they neither plant nor harvest, they have no silo or barn, yet God feeds them. You are worth so much more than birds! ²⁵ Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life? ²⁶ If you can't do such a small thing, why worry about the rest? ²⁷ Notice how the lilies grow. They don't wear themselves out with work, and they don't spin cloth. But I say to you that even Solomon in all his splendor wasn't dressed like one of these. ²⁸ If God dresses grass in the field so

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beautifully, even though it's alive today and tomorrow it's thrown into the furnace, how much more will God do for you, you people of weak faith! ²⁹ Don't chase after what you will eat and what you will drink. Stop worrying. ³⁰ All the nations of the world long for these things. Your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Instead, desire his kingdom and these things will be given to you as well.

Reflection

These words of Jesus about not worrying have given me hope at various times in life in the midst of personal crisis or when the world seems to be falling apart, and they speak to me again during this time of the coronavirus.

Jesus reminded his followers then and us today that the birds and flowers do not worry, and yet, God cares for them. How much more will God care for us, even today.

I admit it's not been easy to not worry. I worry when I hear of people hoarding food from the grocery stores. I wonder how long this social distancing will last. I begin to suspect those around

me might be contagious with the virus. I worry that when we're told to go back to our normal lives, that we may not remember how to do that.

Have you worried during this time that we've never faced before? When I said one day, "Hey Google, how many pandemics have we had?" I received the response, "Sorry, I don't have any information about that."

With a bit more research, I learned that we've had numerous pandemics: AIDS, "Cholera, bubonic plague, smallpox, and influenza are some of the most brutal killers in human history. And outbreaks of these diseases across international borders, are properly defined as pandemic, especially smallpox, which throughout history, has killed between 300-500 million people in its 12,000 year existence."¹

Through the years, in the back of my mind, I always thought of these as events that happened in the past, not today. But here we are again, and for the younger generation, it's the first time you've encountered such an illness of this magnitude. Regardless of our age, however, it's hard not to worry.

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I came across something in my workshop that might help us worry a bit less—what’s called a Shaker peg. The Shakers religious movement began on the mid 1700s. They focus on simplicity and order in their lives and believe each person has Christ’s inner light. To organize their homes, they created these pegs, which they would attach to boards and hung around the house to organize all kinds of things: clothing, brooms, extra chairs, and even candles. In doing so, they created more floor space and less clutter.

Alone, each peg might not hold many items, but when you put them together, they can hold many things. In a similar way, I may not be able to do much by myself during this crisis, but along with all of you, we can hang up many things, just as a rack with many pegs can hold more than one peg by itself. What might we hang on our imaginary pegs during this pandemic to reduce our worries and declutter our spirits?

- Maybe together we can hang up our greed and avoid hoarding to allow everyone to have enough essentials for living.
- We could hang up our fears and rather than getting discouraged, we can try innovative ways of still trying to connect, such as what we’re doing with our live stream worship.
- Maybe we can hang up our unkind words to allow for extra space to offer words of hope.
- Let’s hang up our skepticism to allow room to follow the guidance of social distancing and slow down the spread of the virus.

What else might you hang up on your imaginary pegs in order to make more room for God’s Spirit in your life? Send me a text message right now with your ideas, and I will read them after we share communion together. As one in the Spirit, we can hang up the clutter in our lives and find ways to remain connected through the church, the body of Christ, who unites us all, even in times of distress.

¹ www.mphonline.org/worst-pandemics-in-history