

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;  
for you are with me; your rod and your staff - they comfort me.*

Beloved

Many of us are in mandatory quarantine now. By mid-day it will feel like an eternity. Some will be productive – exercising, cleaning, sorting. Some will binge old movies, histories, mysteries, Hallmark, love stories, war stories. Some will read (basically the same list). Some will take walks. Some will take naps. We will do what we must to keep our sanity.

We've not been this way before. Many do what we've always done, because we've always done it. Maybe we need to challenge ourselves. Try a different genre, switch it up – change the furniture. Choose to spend more time in scripture, more intentional time in prayer. Support one another, call friends, family, the next person in our church directory. Challenge our brain read something more educational than escapist. Or do something different and sit down with a cup of hot chocolate and a good ol' Who Done It.

Let's come through this stronger. Ready to celebrate what we've missed. I think how sweet it will be to gather together at church, to celebrate the eucharist, to hear the sweet sound of our congregation singing *Amazing Grace*. To feel handshakes and hugs. To see smiles, hear laughter. To taste the bread and the wine.

We will come through this. We will be together. Things will be different. Some things will never return to the way they used to be. We will live a new normal. We will have lost friends, maybe family. Some jobs will never return. We will have learned more about ourselves, about humanity, about life. What's important, what is not. Things will be different.

We may feel we are wandering in the desert now. We are staying away from others. We're going cold turkey on not shopping, going out for dinner, attending sporting events, concerts, conferences, retreats, church.

But God is in this. God did not send a virus to judge or destroy. God promises to walk this lonesome valley with us. Recently we heard of how Jesus cried outside of Lazarus' tomb. He grieved with Mary and Martha and their friends. He felt their pain. He shared their pain.

God is with us here in the chances and changes of our life. God has given wisdom to people to find a cure. Compassion to people to care for the ill, to walk with those who fear and grieve. Kindness to others to offer a kind word of encouragement, a roll of toilet paper, a loaf of fresh bread.

We have been told how we can stop Corvid 19 - self-isolate. The Governor has put Montana under a stay at home order. Follow the Golden Rule. Stay away from them. This is how we can halt the spread of this disease. Do not become infected. Do not infect another. God has given us the wisdom to see this will work – but everybody must follow the directive. We are to stay isolated, leaving home only to shop for necessities or for medical care. For a social people this is difficult, but it the best way to love your neighbor at this time. But we must do this, and do it in love.

Stay safe, beloved. Take courage, God is with you. God will never leave you or forsake you. God walks this valley with us and will dance with us when we have come through it.

Respect the disease and remember who walks with you.

May God give you peace  
Pastor Tonia

## **Devotion**

*John 11 is the closing act of a three-act play that begins in John 9 when Jesus opens a blind man's eyes. An investigation arises, and the man is removed from the community. Act Two centers on Jesus the good shepherd, the one who is able to judge just who belongs—namely all of his sheep.*

*Act Three now shows us what belonging means. For Jesus, his power to love will cost him his life. In the opening scenes of John 11, Jesus has been pushed out of town. There on the other side of the Jordan, in the middle of a riverbed, Jesus receives a message: "He whom you love is ill."*

*For those who trust Jesus, belonging is life. To belong does not mean to escape danger. We can be loved by Jesus, and we can also face terminal illness. One does not prevent the other.*

*And this Act—and our lives—do not end in death.*

## **Prayer**

**We are your beloved, O God, and we also face the changes and chances of life. Help us to trust that we belong to you, even when you seem so far away. Amen.**

