

Homily, March 15 2020

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Peace, joy, health and comfort be to you on this sunny Sunday morning.

I asked the worship team if I could have the privilege of delivering the message this morning. As I have said privately and publicly time over time, this congregation, in a few short years has been a home to me that I needed at a time of change in my life and has sustained me through some very difficult times. Times of confusion. Times of pain. Times of searching. And times of knowing that peace, comfort and calm is available to me. I know that God brought me to Spirit of Grace so that I could find all of the above in this thoughtful, brave and resourceful body of people. I hope, as I have set this to be my goal, that I have been a similar blessing to some of you.

I would have preferred to be speaking with you in person, but as you obviously know this is not the case. It is weird. It is unexpected. Basically, it is like any other day around here... just a different kind of weird. A different kind of unexpected. It is weird that two faith denominations came together to make one active and vibrant body? Yes. It doesn't happen. Is it unexpected that our Christmas Eve meal would become the hottest ticket in town every December 25th? Yes. We never would have expected such a positive response to our offering and the blessings we have received because of that offering. Do these things happen on tv and movies? Yes, you see them from time to time. Do they happen up close and personal? Not so often.

The weird and unexpected has come close to us now. So close that we worry about making each other ill. So close that our church leadership has elected to temporarily implement a new form of worship and new ways to satisfy the needs of this congregation. Weird and unexpected is here on our door step. It is also in our hands. It is in the good news we have already shared this morning. God is good. And he

has been particularly good to me. Romans 5: 1-11 is one of my absolute favorite passages and it is truth is especially poignant this morning. "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for righteous person- though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us." There is a sister passage in John 15 that makes this point with even a sharper point. "You did not choose me, but I chose you..." Think about that. Unexpected is the understatement of the year. The comfort that we need so badly right was given before we knew to ask. The promise of hope through Jesus Christ was offered up for our sake without our asking. We wouldn't know what to ask for, and if we did, which one of us would dare to ask on our own merits alone. Unexpected indeed. What's more? It is underserved. Luckily, you and I don't decide our worthiness.

Have any of you been in an airport recently and saw someone wearing a facemask? Or at the grocery store? Is it weird? Well, my mother always told me it is not nice to use words like that regarding people; so let me choose a different word. Unfamiliar. I am a small enough man to admit that sometimes the unfamiliar leads to awkwardness in my head and heart. Have you been out shopping for hand sanitizer and Clorox hand wipes? They are gone. Based on what I have seen in some news reports from large cities, shelves are empty of all food goods and sanitary products. Weird doesn't even come close to describing that. It's flat out bizarre.

John 4 is a Jesus travelling story. He was in a new city called Sychar. It was a Samaritan city. He was out of his element. Jesus, being, well, Jesus certainly didn't have a problem with this strange place and, dare I say, strange people. I'm certain he was tired. We know that he was thirsty. What do I do when I find myself in a strange place and situation being thirsty and tired? Well, more often as not, I find myself a pint, turn inward and rest. Contrary to what my mother in law calls me, I am not "Saint Nate"! Tired and thirsty and what does the one perfect being do? He witnesses. He breaks through the awkwardness. He casts down the stones of the prison, as it were, that keeps this Samaritan living in

shame. He creates the link between himself and her. He clears her eyes to see their sameness as he asks for a cup of water. He has needs. He is human. He opens her eyes to the truth that “the hour is coming”; and of the promised one that even the Samaritans have heard of, he reveals himself saying “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.” What a blessing to her. Unexpected. Weird.

As I mentioned in introduction, Romans 5 is my jam! To the young people, this means “this is my favorite!”. Picking up at verse 3...” And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and that endurance produces character, and character produces hope... AND HOPE DOES NOT DISAPPOINT US, because GOD’S LOVE, has been poured into our hearts through the HOLY SPIRIT that has been given to US.” Think about that for a moment... Did we expect this situation? A virus epidemic? Especially at a time of transition in this church body? Is this suffering? While not on the scale experience by our savior, yes it is form of suffering. Let us embrace that suffering together, knowing that HOPE is at the end of that suffering and God is with us and working through us.