

March 22, 2020 Message from Pastor John

Hear these words of Ephesians 5: 8 – 14.

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.

Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; everything exposed by light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light.

Therefore it says, “Sleeper, Awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

And also these words from Isaiah 60, verses 1, 2, and 19.

Arise, shine, for your light has come...

See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and God’s glory appears over you...

The LORD will be your everlasting light.

We together are facing a very difficult moment.

Our nation, as well as the whole world, is engaged in a public health crisis, an economic crisis, and a spiritual crisis.

On television and through the internet we are hit with rapidly changing news about the public health crisis and the economic crisis.

What I hope to share in this message are practical ways of addressing the spiritual crisis.

We are in this crisis, this storm, together. We will get through this storm by being together. By practicing social solidarity in Christ.

We are brothers and sisters in Christ. We are responsible for our relationships with one another in Christ.

We are responsible for practicing care giving, compassion, kindness, and justice with and toward one another.

In another context I would lift up work for social justice to expose and root out the unfruitful works of darkness.

At our present moment the unfruitful works of darkness are those forces that seek to break our social solidarity in Christ.

In Norwich, New York, as in other communities around the world we need to practice physical distancing. Our health and well-being, and the health and well-being of others depends on this.

Physical distancing is not spiritual distancing. It does not mean social isolation.

We need to live in social solidarity in Christ with one another while at the same time practicing physical distancing as a spiritual discipline.

We are all shut-ins now. It is our social solidarity with each other that will guide us through. To shine light on the darkness of isolation. To live in the Way of Jesus Christ. To be God's people as the Church.

Here are some reflections on practicing social solidarity in Christ. Some personal, some collective.

1. BREATHE! Take a moment to be calm and to breathe. Pray the Jesus Prayer. As you inhale, silently say "Lord Jesus Christ." As you exhale, silently say, "Have mercy on me." Use the word compassion instead of mercy if that fits better for you. Do this when you wash your hands – Breathe and say the Jesus Prayer two or three or four times, however long it takes you to pass 20 seconds washing.
2. Pray every day. Use the prayers in this bulletin. Read a hymn as a prayer.
3. Lift up others in prayer. Make a list of people to pray for. The sick. Those who have lost loved ones. Health care professionals who are putting themselves at risk to help others and to save lives. Those who have lost their job. Our world. Our nation. Our community. Our church. Our families and friends. Make a list. Be specific. Hold these people in the light of prayer.

4. Know that you are baptized. This doesn't give you special protection from COVID 19. The early Christians who Paul wrote to did not get special protection from the oppression of Roman imperialism. Know that you are baptized into the everlasting Love of God. God's Love is stronger and more lasting than any Empire or virus. Knowing you are baptized is to accept and embrace this gift of God's everlasting Love.
5. Use the technology at your fingertips to connect with one another. Call your family and your friends every day. If you can video chat with Skype, Facetime, Google Duo, or other program. Hold a family conference call.
6. Call in on neighbors and church members.
7. Social solidarity in Christ means caring for the most vulnerable. Right now we all feel vulnerable. We take especial notice of those who are alone. Of those who have lost their jobs. Of those in prison in solidarity confinement 24 /7. Of those in danger of domestic abuse, locked inside with their abusers. Of those without means to wash their hands or shelter in place. As we become in touch with our own vulnerability we realize how deeply connected we are to one another.
8. We act with kindness. Be kind to yourself. Be kind to those you are with in your home. Be kind with those you connect with by phone or the internet. May our kindness be a light shining through the darkness. We are a people called:

Called to social solidarity in Christ.

Called to be children of the Light.

Called to embrace the everlasting Love of God.

May you be safe and well.

Blessings and God Speed.