



*AT A DISTANCE
Marathons and Loving One Another*

Greetings Saints,

A beautiful Southwest Washington morning has emerged around us this Sunday as we celebrate our Fourth Sunday of Lent in a very unique and different way. I received a lovely text this morning from our own Dr. Ken Callen. "Doctor Ken" as we all know him, is one of our amazing Native American Flute players with Traveling Day Society. Doctor Ken also very frequently graces us with our First Nations Call to Prayer on Sundays as we gather and center at All Saints each Sunday morning. This morning Dr. Ken writes, " Father Joe, I hope you and your family are OK. This morning I played the Kiowa Love Song at 9:00 AM and then watched a live broadcast from St. Paul's Episcopal Church in San Antonio, Texas. Not a bad Sunday Morning under the circumstances..."

As we move into and through our second Sunday of postponed Sunday Services, suspension of group worship and gatherings, this is an excellent opportunity to get our heads and hearts around the essential Christian message that COVID-19 is providing us the opportunity to internalize. That basic message of Jesus Christ, the essence of Christianity is summed up in the eight parting words that Jesus said, just as he left us..."Love one another as I have loved you." In this new reality that COVID-19 has thrust upon us, how do we continue to "love one another" as Jesus modeled? Let's have a look.

Our beloved Jesus was an amazing empath. Jesus seemed to know instinctively and strongly what his listeners, both disciples and enemies, needed to hear at any given moment. His messages and parables were classics of what we call today “targeted communications.” Each listener getting exactly what they needed, when they needed it most. Fueled by the Holy Spirit, Jesus showed us new, dramatic and very different ways to “love one another”.

In today’s Gospel Message from John, “The Man Born Blind” , https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Lent/ALent4_RCL.html we see Jesus, yet again crafting a message of love, faith and healing to the Blessed Beggar, and a message of love and learning to the representatives of the Jewish Religious Establishment, the Pharisees, who needed to change the way they were thinking.

So, how do we “love each other” during these turbulent and unsettling times? How do we fundamentally change the way we think and act, like Jesus was asking the Pharisees to do in this morning’s Gospel? One way is to protect each other. Suspend our deep desire to congregate, and replace it with an equally deep desire to protect one another from harm. If we truly love one another, we will not put ourselves, our neighbors, our friends, our family and our congregation at risk.

As a Chaplain at Legacy Salmon Creek Hospital, I get to stand with others in our local health care community as we see the pandemic up close and personally. As our hospital leadership shared with us just last week... “Folks, this is not a sprint; this is a marathon.” We must all dig deep and be prepared “to run a spiritual race” as St. Paul says... that will test us to our very core. We are in the very first miles of this marathon that many of us have not trained for. The spiritual “lactic acid” is building up in our legs and our spirits are at first nudging us to stop and then compelling us to stop as we want desperately to go back to our old ways. Comfortable ways, predictable ways. But in this new and dynamic context of COVID-19,

ultimately ways of worship and community that put “me over we”. As we are truly tested to see if we love one another enough to change.

Some in our All Saints Community have asked me to consider some type of “work around” for an Easter Service at All Saints whereby we would gather together in the church parking lot, attempt to maintain social distancing and gather together physically for worship. Blessed Ones, I simply love you too much to consider this. With the hunger that this congregation is having to be together, this type of gathering would simply tempt you beyond your strength, put you at risk of physical harm, and not be true to the Bishops current rules of engagement. Like in Jesus’ Lenten Story of his 40 days in the Desert... remember the Evil One, offering Jesus all the food and kingdoms and glory... if Jesus would just betray his Vision and us. That being said, the Liturgy Team this coming week is working hard to plan and execute some type of “virtual worship experience” for our All Saints Family. Stay tuned.

Blessed Ones, I know you are tired already as we enter Mile Three of our Spiritual Marathon. Now is the time to begin to dig deep, to embrace this time of spiritual testing, to pray more and harder than we ever have, and to love one another enough to stay apart for as long as it takes. Be Strong, Be Safe, Keep Running.

*Blessings,
Father Joe*