

Friends,

In these unusual circumstances in which we are living, the time has come for us to do something that I wish we didn't have to, — but need to do. That is, to cancel in person worship through March 29, and to postpone all activities until the end of March. Given the gravity of the situation, I suspect the time will extend beyond that, but that and other information will be shared with you as we move forward. We will still be livestreaming worship on Sunday, and staff and other leaders will be planning and implementing ways for other forms of study, meetings, and other essential ministries and activities to continue, even if it's in a new way. We will share details about these things in the next few days, so that every person in the church, from the youngest to the oldest, can continue to be part of our wonderful church.

Please know that your staff and other leaders are hard at work to ensure that critical ministries will still be operating, but things are going to look a bit different for a while. We will use the available tools and technology available to us to keep you connected to the body of Christ at Chestnut Level. As I said on Sunday, "When the world is at its worst, the church must be at its faithful best." And we vow to do our best to proclaim the gospel truth of Jesus Christ, meet needs, and offer opportunities for you to spiritually grow even as we will have to be apart from one another.

One way that I plan to stay connected to you is to offer a daily devotional for you. So, rather than just a once a week Friday email blast, each day you will receive from me a scripture, brief devotional, and prayer. I hope this will be spiritual food for your soul, and that amidst any fears or anxieties you may be feeling, God's word will bring you a peace and calm assurance that Jesus is Lord of all, and in control, — and that includes Covid-19, and all the challenges and inconveniences that come with it.

With that, here is my devotional for Tuesday, March 17, 2020.

Psalm 23:4

***"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."***

This beautiful psalm of David is for all occasions, weddings, funerals, daily devotionals, and everyday life. For obvious reasons, it seems especially poignant in the midst of the coronavirus. Psalm 23 is kind of like a psalm behind a glass case, mounted on the wall which says, -- "Break Glass in Case of Emergency." We may not always use it, but it is always there for us, especially when we really need it.

Let's face it, these are dark valleys in which we are journeying, and when it's dark, it's scary, because our footing feels unsure, we can't see clearly the potholes, the twists and turns, where the road ends, and the next steps to take aren't obvious to the eye. It can leave us disoriented,

confused, scared, and maybe even angry. Information is changing not just daily, but hourly, and it can create a feeling of being overwhelmed, and nervous about what is going to happen next.

Through it all, God shepherds us, and as the Good Shepherd, He lovingly nudges us on the right path, and in the right direction, while at the same time warding off evils, dangers, and discouraging thoughts and feelings. We are still going to be the Church! We are not folding our tents! We are still going to do church stuff! It is not always going to be pretty. It certainly will be far from perfect. It is God's grace and God's power that will get us through this.

In the meantime, we are going to boldly ("*fear no evil*") go forward in these unique times. To paraphrase the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:38-39, "Absolutely nothing -- not death, not illness, not fear, not what we see on the TV news, not things we read on the internet, not a lack of toilet paper, not a hoarding of hand sanitizer, not the closing of restaurants, not even a spreading of the coronavirus, — will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Finally, since it is **St. Patrick's Day**, and I am proudly wearing a pair of **green shoes** today, I thought I would close with a prayer of his.

*May the strength of God pilot us.
May the wisdom of God instruct us.
May the hand of God protect us.
May the Word of God direct us.
Amen.*

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