

# MVLP Gather Round E-News - Issue #5

April 1, 2020

This is the fifth issue of our E-newsletter, “Gather ‘Round,” to call us together through the internet to share news and needs and stories with each other. If you have a tale to tell or a perspective to share, please send it on for the next issue! *So, please share what you are reading and watching and writing and knitting and cooking and building while you are sheltering at home.* Two of our readers have done so for this issue; see below.

**Timely Tip!** Pastor Bob is hosting a study of the last part of the Gospel of John tonight at 6:30 p.m. To participate, send him ([revbobh@gmail.com](mailto:revbobh@gmail.com)) your email (if you want to see and be seen) or your telephone number if you just want to hear and be heard. He would love to have you join them!

**Holy Week:** For information about Holy Week services, see below.

## **Rev. Betsy Reflects: How Is It with Your Soul?**

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism in England in the 1700s, would ask, “How is it with your soul?” An English cleric and evangelist, he preached out of doors, organized small discipleship groups, and encouraged people to participate in addressing the social issues of the day. While we may not be burdened by cruel labor conditions of the coal mines, or refugees from the country crammed into narrow disease-infested streets of London, we are living in a time of crisis.

Philosophers would call it an existential crisis, one that strikes at our identity, our sense of self, who we are, what it all means. Most of the time we live on the surface: too busy to reflect on these questions, too busy *doing* – going to work, running errands, getting through each day. And then calamity strikes, this time in the guise of a deadly virus, and we are forced to stop. For the first time in a long time, we aren’t quite so busy doing; we have more time for *being*.

Who are you? What do you think about when there’s time to reflect? What do you do when you have choices about how you spend your time? Most of us, most of the time, are so busy *doing*, that we don’t reserve enough time and space for *being*. It is the existential crises of our time.

Sunday, Kim and I streamed “Unorthodox” – a film based on the life of a teenager in a strict Jewish Orthodox family in Brooklyn, a mostly true story about her flight from rules and religious convention -- a journey to find her own truth, a journey to find herself. It was billed by Netflix as four one-hour episodes. We watched it all in one evening with a short break to walk the dog of a neighbor who has pneumonia.

How is it with your soul? I have been reading Reza Aslan's "Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth," and Marcus Borg's "Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary," to understand this Jesus I have loved since I was a little girl. I sit on the couch with the rain drumming on the windows. My kitty climbs up and gets in my lap, purring as I scratch under his chin, around his ears, shifting my hold on my book to catch the light.

How is it with your soul? Jesus says, "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today" (Matthew 6:34). Kim dragged her guitar out of the closet and tuned its rusty strings and leafed through a book of music she's had since she was 13. I listen as she teaches herself how to play Leonard Cohen's "Alleluia."

For most of us, this is an unprecedented time. Some of us have lost our jobs and wonder what will replace them, how long the savings will last. We find shortages in grocery stores, if we dare venture out. We wonder how we will refill our prescriptions, buy new ink cartridges for our printers, buy a stamps to mail a birthday card. We smell uncertainty in the air. We wait to get back to normal.

Christian writer and theologian C.S. Lewis, who lived through two World Wars, argues that "normal" is an illusion, that there is no normal. And when I hold in my heart and prayers those who are sick and dying and lost, I realize Lewis is right. There is always something waiting to be healed, to be grieved, to be found.

Rev. Don Remick, one of our UCC Conference Bridge Ministers, wrote to us this week about the Pandemic and asked, "Will we survive? Will we thrive?" He quoted Economist Milton Friedman: "Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around." So how are we coping – as individuals and as congregations?

What new ways of ministry are we discovering? How is this crisis forcing us to change? What will we keep from this time? What will be different when the virus subsides, for now? Will we continue our slide into irrelevancy for our young people, or will we have found new purpose? Rev. Nancy Taylor of Old South Church in Boston made an observation after 9/11 – that people flocked to our churches during that time only to discover why they left in the first place. That is our challenge. Are we irrelevant? Or are we essential? That may depend on how we reinvent ourselves during this time. Remick urges us to be faithful to this incredible moment of possibility.

How is it with your soul? Don't waste this reflection time, waiting to hurry back to an illusory "normal." This is the only life we have, at least for now. Let's not waste it! After his four daughters were drowned at sea, Horatio Spafford gave up his profession as a lawyer, and he and his wife became missionaries. He is best known for the hymn which ends, "It is well with my soul, it is well, it is well with my soul."

How is it with your soul?

**Special Prayers:** Please remember...

- ❖ Pat Safstrom's daughter, Erin, is sick with what they hope is only a bad cold, but now Chris, Sean and Katie are also quarantined for two weeks.
- ❖ Barbara Cederfield's doctor called Tuesday morning, postponing her knee replacement until the virus abates, and she is very relieved.
- ❖ Tina Lavallee was thrilled to come home from the VA on Monday, her birthday!
- ❖ Joanne Newton is "hanging in there" and will see her doctor next week.

### **Amazing Grace *redux***

*By Tom Hall*

Amazing grace that we might find / In serving others' needs  
A glow of hope and peace of mind / Not drawn from ancient creeds.

For when our lives give forth both light / And warmth as does the sun,  
An end to mankind's ancient plight / Will have at last begun.

Howe'er we name the Power supreme / That rules the cosmos vast,  
'Tis we alone who must redeem / The sins of ages past.

Our lives we therefore dedicate / To those with whom we live:  
Not to destroy, but to create; / No more to get, but give.

*Editor's note: Tom's rewrite of this beloved hymn for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is borne out as people step up to cook for strangers, go out of their way to deliver groceries, sew medical masks, retrofit equipment to make shields, contribute financial help to people out of work – **no more to get, but give** – during the COVID-19 epidemic.*

### **Gather 'Round for Bible Study**

Both Rev. Betsy and Pastor Bob are leading online Bible Study by Zoom, an internet conferencing resource. To participate, decide which virtual "table" you wish to gather around, and send your email to **Betsy or Bob to "invite" you** (ahead of time).

**Psalms:** Tuesday & Friday mornings at 10:00 a.m. with Betsy, reading and discussing selected psalms. Continues Friday, April 3. Contact (by Thursday) [BetsyAldrichGarland@gmail.com](mailto:BetsyAldrichGarland@gmail.com).

**Gospel of John:** Wednesday evenings at 6:30. Begins tonight, April 1 – no fooling! Contact (by Wednesday morning) [Bob at revbobh@gmail.com](mailto:Bob@revbobh@gmail.com).

### **Window on Wildlife**

Cheryl writes, "Sonja's bird story and your references made me realize that I am not crazy in finding so much enjoyment in the cardinals that visit my feeders. The other day I

had nine males and almost as many females on the feeders and in the scrub brush. They were dotting in and out, beautiful spots of red color as they flew around the yard. I have other beautiful birds as well, but my eyes automatically seek out the cardinals – which give me such comfort and joy. I feel they are always watching over me, and I become obsessed in the most glorious way!”

*And it's not just about the birds.* Sonja, our scientist, writes, “The West Meadow Brook goes under Johnson Road just south of our house. I've been noticing mud, footprints, and wet tracks crossing the road at the bridge and can see a pathway in the gravel/sand/grass on both sides of the road. Earlier, the footprints were smaller, but Tuesday it was obvious that a good sized animal had crossed. Upon closer inspection, I saw that a tree had been girdled (the bark chewed off) all the way around to a height of over two feet. Beaver on the move!”

## **HOLY WEEK PLANS**

### **Psalm Sunday: Mt. Vernon Streams**

Pastor Bob will stream his Palm Sunday Service on April 5 at 12:30 p.m., and I will send his Order of Worship with the “Gather ‘Round” that will be emailed on Saturday so you can follow along. *(If you have ever wondered how to fold a palm branch to make a cross, just google the question and see all the videos that pop up!)*

**Maundy Thursday, Good Friday (?), & Easter Sunrise Services** will be offered by Zoom. Please email me in advance if you want to be included. The bulletins will be attached to the issue of “Gather ‘Round” closest to the service.

**Easter Service** will be streamed on Facebook by Pastor Bob.

**Weekly Offerings** may be mailed for:

**Mt. Vernon** to Ron Allen (116 Barbs Hill Road, Greene, RI 02827),

**Moosup Valley** to Pat Safstrom (76 Moosup Valley Road, Foster, RI 02825),

**Rice City** to Phyllis Dexter (53 Moosup Valley Road, Foster, RI 02825).

### **A Prayer for April Fool's Day**

Give me a sense of humor, / Give me the grace to see a joke,

To get some pleasure out of life / And pass it on to other folk. --*Anonymous*

Reverend Betsy can be reached at [BetsyAldrichGarland@gmail.com](mailto:BetsyAldrichGarland@gmail.com) or 401-463-8697.

Pastor Bob can be reached at [revbobh@gmail.com](mailto:revbobh@gmail.com) or 401-440-7831.

Reverend Betsy Aldrich Garland  
210 Plainfield Pike  
Foster, Rhode Island 02825

(401) 463-8697 (cell)