

MVLP Gather Round E-News - Issue #12

April 25, 2020

This is the twelfth 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!

Mt. Vernon Streams Sunday Service

Worship Sunday, April 26, will be on Facebook Live on the Mount Vernon Larger Parish page at 12:30 p.m. Pastor Bob will look at "A Wonderful Thing Happened on the Way to Prayer" from Acts 3:1-10: <https://www.facebook.com/MVLPspirit/?ref=bookmrks>). The Order of Worship is attached.

When All Seems Lost: Rev. Betsy Reflects

Read Luke 24:13-35

Your best friend, your beloved leader, your only hope for your beloved Israel, has been killed by the Romans: You watched his suffering, how he cried out to God, "Why have you forgotten me!" And you don't know where to put yourself, what to do, how you will go on. And so you hit the road to Emmaus. A walk will give you a purpose, occupy your mind, calm the restlessness.

Theologian Frederick Buechner suggests that Emmaus is probably not an actual, physical village, even though it may show up on a map in our Bibles. He suggests instead that Emmaus is the place where "we throw up our hands and say 'Let the whole damned thing go to hang. It makes no difference anyway.'" It's the place of desolation. It's the young mother holding her stillborn baby, counting her toes before handing her over to the hospital morgue. It's COVID-19.

And then a stranger joins the disciples on the road, falls into step, engages them in conversation. They fill him in on the latest events, how their leader Jesus was crucified by the Romans, and how, this very morning, his body was found stolen by women who had gone to the tomb to anoint him. The stranger takes this news in stride. Says it was foretold by the prophets. He walks them through the scriptures. They relax in his company, whoever he is.

Night begins to fall, darkness gathers around them. It's not safe to be on the road. Where is the stranger going? "Stay with us," they urge him. Friends have a meal awaiting them nearby, and they know their Jewish obligation is to offer hospitality to strangers. The stranger accepts and sits with them at table. He needs no invitation to assume his rightful place among them. He takes up the loaf of bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to

them. And with that simple action – one they had witnessed so many times – they recognize him!

And not just around the table had they watched him take, bless, break, and give. They had seen him take a child on his knee. Bless her. Break the fever that was killing her. Give her back to her parents, healed. They had seen him take the hand of the man possessed. Bless him with his presence, break the demon's hold, and give him back his life. They had seen him approach the money changers in the temple, offer a prayer, break down their table where they cheated the people, and give the pieces back to them – promising he would do this, and more, in the days to come.

They didn't understand then, and they don't understand now. But they have seen this pattern before. Take. Bless. Break. Give. They must have, because in this moment they look up from the table, their eyes are opened, and through their tears, they recognize him. He had been with them all along. On the mission journey these past three years. A Presence on the walk to Emmaus, when all seems lost. *Especially* when all seems lost. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death," the psalmist sings, "thou art with me." "Walk on, walk on, with hope in your heart, and you'll never walk alone," write Rodgers and Hammerstein.

Is this not the way the Holy enters our lives? Not in the miraculous, but in ordinary taking, blessing, breaking, giving? In the hug of a long lost friend, in a note to the widow, in a hand sprucing up the church, in our gifts to the food pantry, in the blessing of an evening meal together, in the talk around the fire to the call of the peepers.

With our eyes opened in the midst of our everyday lives, we are reminded that all is not lost. We are not defeated or alone. Love always wins. Easter is here to stay.

Uncertain Times

By Robin Smith-Johnson

(Laurie Murphy submitted this poem by her sister.)

It is early spring
and the world is waking up.
Only we are indoors,
waiting for news.

Small things matter:
a cardinal at the bird feeder,
a neighbor waving from a safe distance,
a violinist playing a solo.

In a few months, life will return
to something like normal.

We will come together again.
For now the waiting is hard.

Embrace light. Be kind.
It is early spring
and a single voice joins the violin.
Listen.

Special Prayers: Please hold in your heart and prayers...

Joanne as she continues to recover from surgery. She is thankful for your love and prayers. She has been able to talk with David, and the RI Hospital chaplain visits.

Robert Salisbury's family, and those who loved him at Moosup Valley Church, following his death on Wednesday. Bob had been failing for a week or two. This is his final *Shalom*.

Claire's son, Jim, is recovering from COVID-19 with pneumonia and is now strong enough to sit up for a longer period. Prayers that he continues to grow stronger.

Can Anything Good Come Out of the Pandemic?

Barbara remembers the Polio epidemic of 1949, a disease that placed tens of thousands of children inside iron lungs and thousands more quarantined at home. Her brother Bob had a mild case of it, and some of her classmates were in braces or on crutches; others didn't return to school. She writes, "Oh the memories! I lived in Charlotte, NC, through that epidemic. One fall, we extended our vacation in Vermont to avoid the disease. Everyone else had left the summer cottages, so we missed all our friends. We didn't have Candy Land."

Candy Land was invented by a young San Diego schoolteacher named Eleanor Abbott as a patient inside a polio ward to give the immobilized children around her a momentary sense of freedom and mobility. The game board featured an illustration of a boy with a leg brace. Milton Bradley bought the game from Abbott, and to this day, Candy Land continues to be popular, more than 65 years after the disease was eradicated. Of course, so many of us played this game as kids, but I found the back story fascinating. Who knew? Barbara wonders, "What will be invented from this pandemic?"

Gather 'Round for Bible Study

Both Rev. Betsy and Pastor Bob are leading Bible Study by Zoom. To participate, ask to be invited or check for the Zoom meeting notice.

Psalms: Tuesday & Friday mornings at 10:00 a.m. with Betsy, reading and discussing selected psalms and the Easter scriptures. Contact BetsyAldrichGarland@gmail.com.

Gospel of John: Wednesday evenings at 6:30 p.m. with Bob, resuming on April 29, when they will look at Chapters 19-20. To join the Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82510374020?pwd=bEp6eC9PNFpqV1prL3ViZytMRDkydz09>

Meeting ID: 825 1037 4020

Password: 028468 Phone number if you need it: +16465588656

A Poem for the Pandemic

By Pastor Bob

This virus has us all at home, distant from each other.
We surely miss our time together with our sisters and our brothers.
The Concerts in the Valley, Breakfast with the Men,
We sure would like to be with Doug, singing once again!

A Pot Luck Supper would be grand or worshipping together,
Visiting the Nursing Homes – just talking 'bout the weather!
We surely miss the ones we love. Sometimes we just can't bear it,
But while we're isolated now, we will be joined in spirit!

Blessing to the Mount Vernon Larger Parish!

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).

Reverend Betsy can be reached at BetsyAldrichGarland@gmail.com or 401-463-8697.
Pastor Bob can be reached at revbobh@gmail.com or 401-440-7831.

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