

Good Morning! Let us pray... *Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle within us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created And you shall renew the face of the earth. O God who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations, through Christ our Lord. May the words of my mouth & the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight...rock & redeemer of us all. Amen*

**“The Grace of Les Miserables: Turned Upside Down, What Are We to Do?”**

Matthew 26:47-56; Luke 17:20-21; John 18:36

Friends, this season of Lent certainly has taken on characteristics of wilderness and journey that we could scarcely imagine weeks ago. When our world is turned upside down, what are we to do?

Well, the short answer is – adapt! And isn't that the truth! It is said that the only two constants in our world are death and change. Perhaps that is evident in these wise words from William Arthur Ward, *"The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails."*<sup>i</sup>

In this time of staying home, staying put, and staying safe, our society is in the midst of adapting to new normal. If you are reading this online, then you have adapted. If you are seeing and listening to this message, you have adapted. And if you are reading this on paper that came in the mail, this too is adapting.

Our church buildings will be quiet in this time... BUT the church is not closed... nor is it silent... nor is it empty. We keep the classic children's rhyme in our hearts... 'Here is the church, here is the steeple, open the doors and see all the people.' But I am reminded by the Avery & Marsh song that *'the church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is a people.'*<sup>ii</sup> As a faith community (a church) that has been loving and serving God & God's people for 227 years, I am confident that the faithful of Saint James will adapt to our new normal in this season. Further, I am confident that we are not alone... that God is with us in the midst.

How do I know...? Let me ask this... have you received a phone call or a voice message, a text or an email from a member of Saint James?

That is the first evidence of our Caring Team adapting into the Vine and Branches Phone Tree Ministry. These ministers connect with the people in our phone directory once a week... sharing prayer requests and offering to meet other needs they may have. It is one way to be the church when we can't meet face to face, gathered in one place.

Secondly, we bore fruit after just one week! We doubled our callers and can share the opportunity to reach out. The third benefit is updating our contact information. So, if you received a voicemail or an email, please respond so we know you are well and you know you are remembered.

Our scripture passage today is a moment of change. It is the moment the world turned upside down for the followers of Jesus. Jesus has shared the Passover meal and last teachings with his disciples. One in the group, Judas, has gone off to finish arrangements so that Jesus will be arrested.

In the encounter, one of those with Jesus draws a sword and cuts someone. Jesus is swift to respond..., *“Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.”*<sup>iii</sup> Jesus challenges all who are present that there's no need for harm or violence, he has been present to them for days.

In that moment, Jesus maintains an attitude of non-violence...just as he instructed the people on the mountainside in his first teaching (Mt 5:9-11). Further, just days earlier, Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey...symbolic of his peaceful kingdom.

We know the rest of the story...violence and abuse, resulting in Jesus' crucifixion and death.

The questions that arise when confronted with change are...what will we do? How do we respond? How can we go on? (Among others).

In the story of Les Miserables, the revolutionaries have gathered to make change happen in the governing of people. They wanted a more just society, where people would have the opportunity to live without undue needs. Sadly, human nature tends to define ourselves by what divides us...what we have or don't have.

Jesus points us to a world where people aren’t divided, but are united in their love and commitment to the well-being of all people.

So, what are we to do? Friends, in this time we are to stay safe, stay home, and wash your hands. Let’s put a little beat to it, shall we....

Stay safe, stay home, and wash your hands

This week we will share our adapted plans for Holy Week and Easter.

We will provide the Easter Flowers people ordered.

We will continue to connect in a variety of ways so that you and our neighbors know that this body of Christ is awake, alive, alert and enthusiastic in the midst of change and unknown. We can be confident that we are not alone. And we can share the good news that God is doing a new thing, even if we cannot perceive it.

Let’s continue to put our trust in God, and pray for the leaders of our land and our world to make decisions for the well-being of all people.

LET us pray: God of endurance, character and hope, thank you for living in us, loving us and loving through us. May all that we do flow from our deep connection with you and all beings. Help us become a community that shares each other’s burdens. Open our eyes, ears, and minds to ways that we can serve you faithfully and resist the temptation to serve earthly ways. Listen to our hearts’ longings for the healing of our world. [Please add your own intentions.] . . . Knowing you are hearing us better than we are speaking, we offer these prayers in all the holy names of God, Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.countryliving.com/life/entertainment/g5153/positive-quotes-about-change/> 28/03/2020.

<sup>ii</sup> UMH 558 We Are the Church, Richard Avery and Donald Marsh. Hope Publishing, 1972.

<sup>iii</sup> Matthew 26:52, NRSV.