

Rector Reflection; March 19, 2020
The Rev. Devon Anderson

Keeping Quiet
(Pablo Neruda)

*Now we will count to twelve
and we will all keep still
for once on the face of the earth,
let's not speak in any language;
let's stop for a second,
and not move our arms so much.*

*It would be an exotic moment
without rush, without engines;
we would all be together
in a sudden strangeness.*

*Fishermen in the cold sea
would not harm whales
and the man gathering salt
would not look at his hurt hands.*

*Those who prepare green wars,
wars with gas, wars with fire,
victories with no survivors,
would put on clean clothes
and walk about with their brother
in the shade, doing nothing.*

*What I want should not be confused
with total inactivity.*

Life is what it is about...

*If we were not so single-minded
about keeping our lives moving,
and for once could do nothing,
perhaps a huge silence
might interrupt this sadness
of never understanding ourselves
and of threatening ourselves with death.*

*Now I'll count up to twelve
and you keep quiet
and I will go.*

Dear Trinity Family:

Parishioner Denise Reilly texted this Pablo Naruda poem to me weeks ago, as what is now our reality was just beginning to unfurl and make itself known. At that point we knew the coronavirus was coming and that we would likely need to stay away from each other, but we didn't know what it would mean or look like and what the ramifications would be. I expect in a few weeks we'll be living into a whole new reality that will be different from what things look like today. Still, the poem's essence still speaks. Now, in these days of quarantine and distancing, we turn into ourselves. Now we turn to God. Now we become more fully aware of the desperate plight of people less fortunate than ourselves. Now we are silent, watching and waiting and listening.

This may be what my husband Michael calls a "frequent glimpse of the obvious" – but we are living in an extremely anxious time. We just don't know what the immediate or long-term future will bring. That unknowing of our relational, spiritual, economic, educational, and professional futures brings with it fear, uncertainty, and disorientation. And we don't know how long it's going to last. The latest from CDC is saying no in-person gatherings until May 10th. To me that feels optimistic.

I've been working hard these past weeks on naming and managing my own fear and anxiety in the midst of supporting the Trinity staff, figuring out ways the Trinity community can care for each other, and learning (quickly) how to move church on-line for the foreseeable future.

I want to share with you what is helping me in this moment of fear and anxiety, in the hope that it might help you, too.

First, throughout the day, over and over, I call myself back to God, and put myself in God's presence. In my sermon last Sunday (from a pulpit looking out over an empty chapel), I said:

This past week I've been thumbing through my well-worn library of Narnia books by C.S. Lewis. and I came upon this beautiful moment in the second Narnia book, Prince Caspian. The four children, Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy are back in Narnia – and everything is strange and different. Years in Narnia are the equivalent of a few moments in their other life, and though they have been gone from Narnia for a few months, decades and eras have passed there. The castles they had known are covered with vegetation. The trees no longer talk. All of their friends are long gone. There's a new sheriff in town, and new perils to navigate. In one lovely scene, Lucy returns, alone, to the place where she used to meet the lion Aslan. She goes back to that place in order to remember what he taught her, to feel the depth and stability and peace and hope that relationship offered her. She goes back to that place to ground herself, to find her way in a new reality.

It's helping me to remember that God is still here. God is still with us. God is still working and speaking and moving and healing. Whenever I get caught up in what I cannot control or make better -- I stop, take a breath, and invite God to be with me. Sometimes I'll say something like, "I'm here," or "Thank you," or "Bless me." All around us there is a deeper world, a deeper,

fuller reality and truth and strength that is God in our midst. And what is helping me is stopping and reconnecting to God's world, and the fullness and peace and assurance it offers. It helps to revisit what we know about God, when we last "saw" or experience God as an act of orientation and grounding. I think worship can help with this – who cares if it's on-line? On Monday I'll begin offering a Compline service every weeknight at 8:00 pm via Zoom. We'll offer Sunday morning worship (live this Sunday, but after that - pre-recorded). And it helps me to remember that *while we may be by ourselves, we are not alone*. We have each other, bound together by the enduring power and love of God.

More practically, what is helping me is a spectacular new podcast called "Poetry Unbound," in which every Monday and Friday the Irish poet Pdraig O Tuama reads a single poem, unpacks that poem, and then reads the poem again. The installments are 7 to 10 minutes long, and they are delicious and inspiring, peaceful and supportive. <https://onbeing.org/series/poetry-unbound/>

I practice yoga, using the on-line service: <https://www.gaia.com/>. You can select what kind of yoga you want to do, for how long, and at what level (beginner, advanced). Michael and I, along with our dogs Milo and Manuel, walk around Lake Harriet every, single day at the end of our in-home workdays. We see neighbors, former parishioners, fellow hockey parents, and lots of dogs. I count my blessings. I have befriended "keeping quiet." And I have made some peace with the disappointment of giving up a long-anticipated (and badly needed) Spring Break trip with my son and the letting go of watching my daughter complete her sophomore year at Boston College. These are small things, small disappointments in light of the surrounding crisis, but still, I think it important to acknowledge disappointment as a way of moving beyond it.

We all have different responses to the times in which we are living. I am feeling that what is most important is that we are understanding and respectful of each other's reactions and give each other a "wide birth" to feel those feelings without judgement. I think it's important that we are vigilant about being gentle with, and kind to, ourselves. And finally, that in these uncharted waters I think it critical that we learn to trust the dark, knowing that God never leaves us, and there is, within our grasp, a north star that will continue to give our life meaning and guidance, peace and direction.

May God's Peace be always with you.