

**The text for both the First Pew (children's sermon) and Pastor Gusti's full sermon are included below.**

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### **First Pew**

#### **Is Church Really Cancelled?**

How did you feel when you found out church was canceled today?

Sad? Scared? Secretly a little bit glad that you got to sleep in today?

I felt all of those things, too. This has never happened to me before!

What's going on?

Well, what's going on is that God is asking us to worship a little bit differently for a while. Instead of having all of us get together in the same building on one morning of the week, God wants us to worship in our own homes, with our own families, *every* day of the week!

This feels a bit strange, doesn't it?

But did you know that is actually what God has *always* wanted?!

In fact, there was a time, many many years ago, when there were not any church buildings at all. The first Christians worshiped in their homes, every day, just like we are doing today. When they "went to church" on Sunday, they actually went to someone's house.

Can you imagine?

The truth is, church has not been "canceled" at all! Because church has never really been just a place we go to on a Sunday morning. Church has always really been a community of people who say, like we do, "In life and death we belong to God."

And that is really good news.

Let's pray:

Thank you, God. For giving us "Church." And help us, God, "be the church" wherever we are.

And let the Church say, "Amen."

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## Sermon

### “Hitting a Rock with a Stick”

My mother has a black and white photograph hanging in the hallway of a three year old girl holding a two foot long stick. The girl’s eyes are wide with anticipation as she prepares to whack the brightly decorated papier mache llama hanging just to her side. She has been told there is a special treasure inside that piñata and that if she just hits it hard enough with her stick, then streams of candy—butterscotch and peppermints and Hershey kisses—will flow down like river. She really wants that candy.

The three year old girl hits the piñata really hard, harder than she has ever hit anything in her life. She swings that long stick so hard, in fact, that she loses her balance and skids onto the concrete floor, scraping her hands and her knees.

No candy flows down from that pretty piñata. The only things she has to show for her valiant efforts are bruised up limbs and a deflated dream.

“There was never any candy in that stupid llama!” she screams at her parents in her distress. “You tricked me and now everyone is laughing at me. I wish I could just go home. I wish I had never come here at all!”

She stomps over to the corner and refuses to speak to anyone. Not to her mother, who tries to convince her there really is candy in that llama. Not to her father, who chastises her for acting like a baby. Not to her best friend, Susan, who brings her the stick and begs her to try again. This candy-loving, stick-whacking three year old has given up hope and refuses to pretend otherwise.

The ancient Israelite community we encounter in our text from Exodus this week has also given up hope, but on a much more spectacular scale than our piñata-challenged three year old. The ancient Israelites are literally wandering from one place to another in the wilderness between Egypt and the land of Canaan, never quite sure where they will end up next. They live “paycheck to paycheck,” which for them means gathering up frost-like flakes that fall on the ground each morning and a handful of quail each night. It is not much—not butterscotch or chocolate or even milk and honey—but it is enough to sustain them from one day to the next.

The industrious ones among them fear their luck may run out and want to save for the future. Maybe the manna won’t come the next morning! Maybe the quail won’t come the next night! But when they try to save the manna and the quail, it just turns to worms overnight. Day-to-day living is the only option in this barren desert.

The social climbers among them crave the stability of food and drink from their former lives in Egypt. Slavery is better, they say, than this uncertain existence. But the decision to leave has already been made, and they have no choice but to press ahead.

And so the ancient Israelites arrive at a new camp on a new day—sustained but worried, pushing forward but second-guessing—and realize there is no water for them to drink. And it starts all over again. “There never was any land of milk and honey calling us out of Egypt!” they lash out at Moses. “You tricked us and now we will die and our children and our farm animals with us. We wish we could just go back to Egypt. We wish we’d never come here at all!”

What do you do if you’re Moses, the reluctant leader of this rag-tag alliance? What do you do if you’re the parent of a three-year old who has never seen candy spill from a piñata? What do you do if you’re stuck in a day-to-day existence and don’t know how you’re going to pay next month’s rent?

What do you do if you’re stuck at home in the midst of a global pandemic?

“Hit that rock with the stick, and water will come out of it so the people can drink,” says our God. Hit that rock with the stick and streams out of the rock will cause water to flow down like rivers.

“I will stand in front of you on a rock at Mount Sinai,” the Holy One offers to Moses ... and to us. “I will stand with you in front of that papier mache llama,” says the parent to the small child. “I will stand with you in front of your small business cratering,” says our God to the restaurant owner threatened by COVID-9. “I will stand with you in front of your world collapsing,” says our God to the laid-off seasonal worker at a sports venue.

Hit that rock with a stick, says our God to everyone who wonders how we’re going to survive in these uncertain times. Keep on hitting it, even though you’re flying blind, even though others second-guess you, even though you second-guess yourself. I have led you out of slavery, and I have given you manna and quail, and I will give you more than enough water, as if from the deep ocean. I have done it before, and I will do it again. And I will stand with you, even until the end of the age.

We don’t know when that papier mache piñata will finally break, we don’t know when that rent check will finally come, we don’t know when this global pandemic will end.

What we do know is that the river of the water of life still flows. What we do know is that God is still with us, and we are still with God. What we do know is we still have each other, even if we are confined to our homes in this wilderness wandering of ours.

And that is more than enough. Amen.