

## SOLIDARITY IN OUR SUFFERING

Rev. Gusti Linnea Newquist  
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church  
May 24, 2020

An “Incarnational Translation” of 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11

Dear Beloved Children of God,

I know this global pandemic is really, really hard. None of us have ever lived through anything like it. We used to think – or at least I used to think – that these kinds of experiences were consigned to a remote past. Like “The Dark Ages.”

From the biblical perspective, though, it is our pre-pandemic expectations of “how life should be” that are the aberration. The kind of fear and anxiety we feel now is nothing new for most of the human experience.

From the biblical perspective, this time of global pandemic can actually be seen as an *opportunity*. A chance for us at SPC to live out what we really mean when we say we are a community of “Radical Hospitality, Holistic Spirituality, and Engaged Compassion.” Not just in a beautiful building for an hour or two on a Sunday morning, but in every part of God’s good creation in every time of the day or night.

The truth is The Radical Hospitality, Holistic Spirituality, and Engaged Compassion of Jesus have never really been about a building at all. They have always been about how we are meant to be The Body of Christ *in the world*.

The truth is, friends, *we* are God’s true temple, and have always been. Gathered, yes, in this time of weekly worship. To remember who we really are. And to whom we really belong. But distributed, most of the time, as the priesthood of all believers. In our homes and in our schools and in our workplaces. Even if our schools and our workplaces are all “on-line” these days.

We say in the church, especially in the Season of Easter, that we are a “death and resurrection” community, based on the death and resurrection of Jesus. When we say this, we usually mean that we are committed to sharing one another’s sufferings and sharing one another’s joys. And SPC is really good at this! In just seven months I have seen the profound caring and resilience and solidarity in our congregation as we have faced grief and heartache. Even before the novel coronavirus changed our world forever.

But now we have to learn an even deeper meaning of what it is to be a “*death and resurrection*” community. Life as we knew it has been changed. Forever. As much as we wish it were not so. And it is so painful to admit. But, truthfully, it may be even more painful *not* to admit.

But we are a “*death and resurrection* community” in the church! That means we trust that God really is working all things together for good, even when everything we have come to rely on is falling apart all around us. That means we trust God to help us find a way out of what really does seem like “no way.”

We – or at least I – have not always needed to develop this kind of biblical trust. We – or at least I – may have even dismissed it as naïve. As a relic from those “Dark Ages” that may have helped “those poor people” back then but just wasn’t necessary for we who are more enlightened today.

But today we *do* need that kind of trust.

The truth is, we – or at least I – have been humbled in this time of global pandemic. It is a stark reminder that we are “humans from the humus” and to the humus we shall return. That our very human wants and needs may not be the center of creation after all. That our times have always been – and always will be – in the powerful hand of the God of *all* creation, even when we thought we were doing this on our own.

The truth is, we have been and will continue to be tempted to despair. To fear for our own lives and for the lives of others. To try to rush “back to normal” as a way to avoid what is really happening to us. Or to self-isolate in grief over “the new normal” that has not even yet begun.

But when we are tempted, when we are angry, when we are afraid, we cannot forget the most important thing: God loves every one of us! And so do we! And God can handle our doubt, our fear, our anxiety, our hope. God can even handle our anger at such a time as this.

Our siblings throughout the world, who are suffering just as much as we are – and worse! – *they* need the Radical Hospitality, Holistic Spirituality, and Engaged Compassion of Jesus, now more than ever. *They* need us to keep on keeping on, trusting in the God of all grace and power to restore, support, strengthen, and establish us as a beautiful New Creation on earth, as it is in heaven.

So don't give up! My beautiful, beloved, wonderful, *distributed* congregation. And don't give in. God is still giving us everything we need to live out God's mission through us at SPC. And God will still be with us, always, even to the end of the age.

With great love,  
Pastor Gusti