

God's love abides forever, which is a REALLY long time!

What is your favorite holiday? Christmas, Halloween, or your birthday? I always loved Easter. It meant so many good things: the days were getting warmer, Easter dresses and Easter candy. Yes, it was based on a sad story, because Jesus died. But, we all knew that he would rise from the dead, talk to the disciples, and ascend into heaven with his Father. Then the disciples went out and did their job of spreading the good news. So the story has a happy ending, right?

This spring, for the first time, I began to have a better understanding of how devastating it must have been for the Disciples and how they must have felt when Jesus was brutally murdered. They lost their leader, friend, and mentor.

This spring, as it became obvious, that millions of people would become ill and die, I began to experience a tremendous feeling of sadness and loss: for the world, for all the people I knew, and all the people I did not know. As social distancing was implemented, I experienced all the things Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross calls the stages of Grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

I watched all the other people around me and on TV as they tried to make sense of this. I could see their anxiety and fear. The repercussions and unintended consequences of the pandemic overwhelmed me. Then I realized, we all kept asking the same question: **What is the plan?**

When in doubt, I did as I always do, I pulled out my books and started researching. Nothing is ever really new. Somebody else has to have faced this type of crisis before. And sure enough, I found both comforting words, encouragement, and hope. I also found some very inspiring PODcasts and TED talks.

I chose this Bible verse because in just a few words, I believe it says everything.

“Your faithfulness endures to all generations; You established the earth, and it abides. (Psalm 119:90)”

In my opinion, the word “Abides” says it all. God is here to make sure that things remain stable and fixed. His love abides forever. And forever is a really long time! Our understanding of time, and comprehending

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our relationship to it, changes. As kids, we were very aware of today and tomorrow. It was either a school day or not a school day, and of course, Sunday also came every week. For us as kids, it was forever until Christmas. And when you are getting married, it's impossible to imagine that in just a blink of the eye, you will be going to your last day of work and will be older than your grandmother, when she died. (*Slide - grandmother*) As I have aged, I now have a much better understanding of what it means when the Psalm says God's faithfulness endures for ALL generations. He's been around a LONG time.

While right NOW this seems like the biggest catastrophe that has ever occurred, it probably is not. We have so much more than previous generations that make us able to pull together and network. (Yes!) It is big and it is very bad, but we will pull through this and hopefully some things will change for the better. So one of the stories that inspired me this week was on Memorial Day. The USS Indianapolis was sunk on July 30, 1945. There were 1190 men aboard. Three hundred went down with the ship, so that left 890 men, some of them wounded in the Pacific Ocean. The sun was blazing hot during the day and went below 85 degrees in the water at night. They were dehydrated, sunburned, hungry--and then there were the sharks. The life jackets that they had were only made to last 2-3 days. By day 4, no one had come looking for them. When they left the port, no one notified their destination that the ship had left the port, so no one realized they had not arrived at their destination. **It was kaos.** (No good computers, just a big chalk board and typewriters.) It was completely by accident that a small plane spotted them. Three hundred and sixteen men were rescued.

But the amazing part of the story was the psychologist who said, "The men who survived were not necessarily the ones that could swim the best or had been uninjured. It was the men who had HOPE that they would be found and believed that there was someone there with them." They had been trained to use their minds to advocate for themselves.

I think the Dali Lama phrases it very well: The crucial thing with religious beliefs is for our mind to merge with the teaching or practice that one receives, and to APPLY these in daily life. This is not something one

can manage just like that. It comes gradually through training.

That describes exactly what we have been doing. We have been laying a foundation and training our minds, to help us in times like this. If you break your leg, I imagine you have a pretty good idea of what the plan would be: 1. don't try to walk on it and make it worse (of course some people do try to walk on a broken leg and drive themselves to the hospital... that should not be plan A). 2. Call for help so someone can drive you to get the proper medical attention. God bless cell phones.

But what happens when we get anxious, angry, and depressed? Anxiety and depression are not things that people talk about. There is a stigma. It is the elephant in the room. Everybody knows it is there, but nobody is willing to talk about it. If somebody breaks a leg, we bake cookies and cook dinner for them. But we tiptoe around when somebody is struggling with anxiety or depression. We don't want to embarrass them and sometimes, we just don't know what to say.

Now, There is anxiety with a little "a." You are getting by, but a little support might be helpful.

Emotional support: Pick up the phone or text a friend. Connect with someone.

Get a routine: get up and get going. Sleeping in occasionally might be okay, but you may not really feel better. Are you eating healthy? Take a walk around the block and see all the beautiful flowers.

Spiritual life: it needs to be nurtured too. Join a small Zoom group. We are starting several in the next few weeks.

Giving: There is nothing that makes us feel better and gets those good hormones flowing than to reach out and do something for someone else. We have several projects going on now: we are writing cards to our service men and women and other projects in the community.

But when it turns dangerous, anxiety with a capital "A," and you are having trouble doing simple activities every day, it is time to get help. There are many good resources: finding a healthcare professional such as your physician or a mental health counselor. Our pastor, Rev. Kang and the other leaders in the church may be a very helpful resource. The United Methodist Women have podcasts called Faith Talks that are excellent. I highly recommend the one on anxiety.

One of the things that makes our church so special, is that we have small groups to keep us connected. If

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you are not already Zooming, give one of us a ring. We have game night and book groups. Soon we are going to have a couple of movies. Yes, we all miss being together, but with the Zoom groups and the internet services, we can connect and stay safe. Being connected is such an important part of being healthy and happy.

When I read the story about the guy who has crossed the Atlantic Ocean not 1 time or 2 times, but 3 times in a kayak (different routes, so he needed different kayaks each time), I thought, WOW. It really was a long way to the other side of the Ocean. Right now it is tough. But we have the tools to help us get through it. I want to put in one plug for the United Methodist Women, since I am the current President. The program book for 2020 is "**Finding Peace is an Anxious World.**" It is based on the Serenity Prayer: God, grant me the serenity, To accept the things I cannot change; Courage to change the things I can; And the Wisdom to know the difference.

We will be setting up some small groups. Contact one of us if you would like to join a small group. I called Edith Eddie this week and asked her permission to show this film that was made by What a wonderful perspective and wisdom she has. And without further ado...

This is my version of Paul Simon's song:

"The problem is all inside your head," she said to me.
"The answer is easy if you take it logically.
I'd like to help you in your struggle to be free from fear
There must be fifty ways to leave your fear."
She said, "It's really not my habit to intrude;
Furthermore, I hope my meaning won't be lost or
misconstrued,
But I'll repeat myself at the risk of being crude
There must be fifty ways to leave your fear,
Fifty ways to leave your fear."
You just slip out the back, Jack.
Make a new plan, Stan.

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You don't need to be coy, Roy,
Just get yourself help.
Hope on the bus, Gus,
You don't need to discuss much.
Just drop off the key, Lee,
And get yourself help.

She said, "It grieves me so to see you in such pain; I wish there was something I could do to make you smile again." I said, "I appreciate that and would you please tell me about the fifty ways."

Then I realized, as a Christian, I already knew some of the answers.

Thank you, Lord, for all the unsung men and women in the Tech industries who have made it possible for us to stay in contact with each other. They are just as important as nurses, firemen, police and grocery store workers. Without the Techs we would be isolated. We are in this together and they are helping us to be together. They make it possible to discuss our anxieties so we can deal with them. Thank you for giving us technology. And thank you also for helping us to invent pants with elastic waists.