

4.12.2020 Easter Day Morning Prayer (Matthew 28:1-10, 16-20)
God doesn't practice social distancing

Stay home, stay safe. That's the advice we're receiving from world leaders and medical experts. It's something they say we can all do to prevent spreading the new coronavirus, a way to keep ourselves, our families and friends and neighbors healthy in this time of great sickness. Stay home, stay safe. From a Christian perspective, that's not only good advice, it's also a way for each of us to fulfill one of the two greatest commandments. As you know the first and greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and the second is like unto it, to love our neighbor as ourselves, and the act of social distancing provides a way that we can literally and tangibly love our neighbor in such an intimate way, for when we practice the difficult discipline of remaining at home and distancing ourselves from others, we put the good health of our neighbors above our own self-centered desire for freedom. The freedom to travel, the freedom to walk up and down the aisles of our favorite store, the freedom to come and worship on Easter Day.

Stay home, stay safe. That's not only good advice from our leaders, it's a way to love our neighbor as ourselves, and it's certainly the best course of action as we engage in this physical battle against sickness and death. Yet as I considered the passages we read from Holy Scripture on this Easter Day, I was comforted by the thought that in the spiritual battle for both our body and our soul, the Lord and Savior of the World, Jesus Christ, did not stay home, He did not stay safe. What I would ask you to consider on this Easter Day is the eternal and the historical truth that God doesn't practice social distancing. In this difficult time of physical separation, in this difficult time of trial, there may be moments when we feel as though God is far from us, but my friends feelings aren't facts. What is true is more important than what we feel is true. What is true is more important than what we feel is true, so if your feelings have led you to believe that God is not present in this trial, then listen once more to the promise we heard in our New Testament reading this morning, a promise Jesus made to all who follow Him, He said, *"I am with you always, even unto the end of the world"* (Matthew 28:20).

Stay home, stay safe. That's good advice, it's a way for us to put the needs of

other people before our own selfish desire to exercise our freedom, and at this time it's clearly the right thing to do. Yet when we consider Jesus' promise to be with us always, and when we understand that this promise He made simply echoes the message that the Bible communicates from Genesis to Revelation, what we discover is the truth God will not stay home, He will not safely insulate Himself from our trials and sorrows, because it is God's nature to be with us always, even unto the end of the world.

There are countless passages that we can reference to illustrate the truth that God is with us always, the truth that He is our closest Companion, our greatest Comforter, our constant Protector, and our faithful Guide. This morning we could begin at the beginning, and read in Genesis about the hands-on approach that God took when He formed man "*from the dust of the ground*" and breathed into him "*the breath of life*" (Genesis 2:7). We could read about the Exodus and the miraculous way God not only freed His people from slavery in Egypt, but dwelt among them, leading them in a pillar of cloud by day and comforting them with His constant presence through a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:22). We could continue through the Old Testament and read the accounts of God's holy presence, His mighty power, and His abundant provision in the lives of His people. Yet with what we're facing now, and when we consider the advice we're receiving that tells us the best thing to do in a time of sickness and death is to stay away from one another, I keep returning to the thought of the Incarnation, the unimaginable truth that Almighty God, in the Person of Jesus Christ did not stay away, but instead, God became man. He left His heavenly home to live the life we couldn't live, to die the death that we deserve. He took it upon Himself to repair our relationship with the Father because of His desire to be with us always.

The Word who was with God in the beginning, the Word who was God in the beginning, "*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" (John 1:14). When St. John writes about the Incarnation, he tells us that God literally "*pitched His tent*" among us. So we see that instead of keeping a safe distance between Himself and His people, God chose to place Himself in the center of this fallen world. He is with us in our fears and failures. He is with us in our trials and sorrows. God is with us in sickness and in death, and when we take a moment to reflect on all that it cost Him to come to us in human flesh, we

will come to a greater understanding of His unconditional, sacrificial love for us.

Now it's certainly impossible for us to see things from God's eternal perspective, but for just a moment let's try to consider His point of view by imagining that in your home you lack nothing, and I'm not talking about canned foods, hand sanitizer, or toilet paper. I mean you literally lack nothing. Every aspect of your life is completely and perfectly fulfilled. In fact, you could go so far as to describe your home and your life as not only being filled with love, but actually being love itself. Picture living in a home where you long for nothing, and the other persons you live with never think of themselves, they never selfishly act in their own best interest, but always pour themselves out completely in a perfect expression of unconditional love.

If your life is anything like mine, it's difficult to picture such a perfect existence, but as ideal as that description may sound to us, it doesn't even begin to illustrate the Absolute, Infinite Perfection in which God dwells, nor does it begin to plumb the depths of the personal and eternal union of self-giving love that exists between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. In fact, any of our words that try to convey an eternal truth about God will be weak and flawed, yet the one thing that I do believe this description helps us recognize is the truth that the Eternal and Triune God, the Creator of Heaven and earth, who lives in an everlasting union of self-giving love and who lacks nothing, clearly had only one reason to become man, to suffer and die and rise to new life on Easter Day, and that reason is you. The Incarnation. His human birth and life. His passion and death. His Resurrection and Ascension. It was all for His beloved, it was all for you.

My friends at this time we need to stay home, we need to stay safe. We need to love our neighbor by refusing to spread this virus, and as we show them our love by giving up some of our freedom and keeping our distance, remember that God manifests His love for the world by never staying at a safe distance. Easter is certainly a celebration of that fact, because God didn't stay at a safe distance when He came to us in human flesh. He didn't stay at a safe distance when He personally and painfully confronted sin and death all that held us captive, and He will not stay at a safe distance now. The *living and true God*, who spoke heaven and earth into existence, speaks this

promise to you today: “*I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.*”