

## Newsletter Reflections for April

As the month of March draws to an end, it has been such a chaotic time that the usual reflections for the month do not seem appropriate. It is certainly not shaping up to be a usual spring; a time to focus on the beauty of the emerging flowers and think about the promise of new life seen in the green grass and leaves that are beginning to show. Other concerns seem to demand consideration. Yet despite the drastic upheaval in the social and/or economic fabric of our lives, many truths still remain. The truth of the resurrection and new life in Christ is certainly one which forms the solid foundation upon which we rely even amid unsettling events in the world around us. In fact, despite the reality that I am personally in that “high risk, vulnerable group” about which the media warnings are swirling, my life has not been that drastically altered. Perhaps inconvenienced, certainly changed, but not terribly impacted; at least not yet. Some things are being altered, but in the grand scheme of things, these alterations cost me little and to not make the changes would be selfish on my part. I am truly blessed in many ways: my children are grown, so the closing of schools does not disrupt my life. My daughter already works from home, so the closing of schools does not really disrupt her life and thus mine. My son and I are both in ministry, so our schedules are more self-regulated than most folks. Like many, my level of concern has risen. I wonder how to better minister at a distance. Having admitted that my life has not been disrupted as much as have many others, there is still much to reflect upon about what is happening. I need to reflect on how my actions might help minimize the disruptions felt by some others. These disruptions are causing upheavals with large ripple effects throughout much of our communal life around us. The decisions made at the higher levels of institutions are generating consequences—intended and unintended—some needed and helpful—some which will prove to cause harm especially in the connections and relationships among us. Some of these with harmful potential will be due to the exposing of already existing fault lines in our society which have been deepening in recent years. When I think of this, I think of the many ways our society has separated into groups that are fragmented and which already view others with hostility. I think that perhaps the terminology being used of “social distancing” in and of itself may be somewhat harmful—because what we really need is physical space between us not really social space. We need to hold onto our social connections and relationships, just not exhibit those connections in a physical sense. Yes, we need to avoid gathering in large crowds or being present among large groups. But we need to avoid “isolation” if it leads to not being aware of one another; if it leads to our further separating ourselves into groups which cannot talk to or understand one another. Social contact through the use of “social media” where we exchange messages of caring, where we let one another know that we are thinking of one another can be done without compromising that physical space and distance that is needed to reduce the spread of infection. For those who do not have “Facebook” or “Instagram” or “e-mail” as outlets for maintaining contacts with others, there are the old fashioned methods now called “snail mail” which the US Postal service facilitates. In fact, if you find extra time during this period of less “going out and about”, perhaps online searching might open your horizons to some new folks

who can be “friends at a distance.” You might find a group with a shared interest online. When we do go out for those necessary errands, we can extend to those we meet a warm greeting by the smiles we share. Smiles do not require physical contact, but they do spread warmth and a sense of mutual caring. Greeting others with a wish for a “blessed day” costs the one giving the greeting nothing and in no way requires coming closer than the recommended six feet of separation but it can do a lot to alleviate a sense of loneliness and isolation just the same. Being greeted by a smile somehow makes the day better for both the one who receives the smile and the one who gives it. Despite the difficult situations that we face, if we face them together; if we come together showing consideration for one another, then we will all do much better. This news of this infection which dominates the news around us today has dominated my thoughts, my reflections, and my prayers for the last several weeks. It will probably continue to do so for awhile. However, my firm conviction is that if we follow the teachings of our Lord and witness to his love by demonstrating care for one another by word and deed (by physical, not emotional distance), then our witness will bring light into the darkness.

Shalom,

Pastor Libby