

March 20th, 2020

Dear All,

What a difference a week makes! Along with many of the rest of you, St. Mark's has had to make quick adaptations and adjustments so the work of the parish can continue remotely. Meanwhile we are all only just beginning to grasp the scope of the challenge now before us: this will not be a simple "blip" on the radar screen before quickly going back to normal; we will have to lean into a new way of being, praying, and working together, mediated by phone and the internet, even while we figure out how to best utilize those technologies. We've heard from the Bishop that the suspension of public worship will now continue through May 10, far longer than anyone would have wished.

I'll share some further details below, but before I get there: please, I cannot impress upon all of us strongly enough **how important it is for everyone to reach out to one another and to stay in touch** over the coming weeks. More than anything else — more than live-streamed services, online programs, newsletters, etc. — keeping in personal touch with one another will be what gets us through. Who sits next to you in the pew? Behind you? Or, who do you notice keeps to themselves? Or, who lives near you? Who serves on a committee with you? Please, just give them a call: it need not be long, only to say you're thinking about them and wanted to check in. Then, if they're in any kind of need, you can connect them with me or the YADAs; but more often than not, your phone call in itself will be the real, substantive good. If you need help signing up to our online directory, or if you'd like a .pdf or physical copy of the directory, be in touch with Toni (office@stmarksberkeley.org) and she'll help you out.

Now for a few further details:

The Livestream

You do not need a facebook account in order to watch our livestream, and you do not need the facebook app either. Just navigate in your web browser to our page (link below), and scroll down until you see the live broadcast (we'll start streaming at about 9:50am, barring any technical issues); or, hit the "videos" link on the left hand side of the page and that should work as well. Of course, Facebook would be glad if you signed up for an account, and they will prompt you to do so, but you can safely ignore that prompt. <https://www.facebook.com/stmarksberkeley/>

The Rector

With the office closed, more than ever my cell phone is the best way to reach me: please feel free to call or text, and I'll get back to you as soon as I can. That number is 630-336-2137. So you have a sense of what I'm up to throughout the day: as far as possible I'm keeping a regular "office day" — study, planning, and writing in the morning with visits, meetings, and office hours in the afternoon/evening, with morning and evening prayer remaining the twin pillars of the whole; though obviously pastoral emergencies take precedence, and I'm always happy to adapt the pattern to meet when it's possible for you. Please do not hesitate to call or text!

Help with Food, Medicine, Technology, etc.

The YADAs are organizing help for anyone who needs groceries or medicine, or who would like a phone call to help them connect with the technology we're using. If you'd like to be connected with this, please just be in touch with me, with Toni, or with Margo Strakosch (m.e.strakosch@gmail.com). If you find yourself in financial need, please reach out to me directly: the rector's discretionary fund exists for this kind of emergency, and there are some other resources we might be able to tap as well. Obviously funds aren't limitless, but we are here to help in any way we can!

Holy Week and Easter

We will still observe Holy Week and Easter, though understandably it will be much reduced in scale and scope. At the moment my intention is to livestream the scheduled, 7:30pm services for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Vigil at the very least; Tenebrae on Wednesday will not happen; and I'm not sure yet what we will be able to offer at 12pm on Good Friday, but stay tuned for more information there. We will keep Easter Day via Livestream.

It's a sadness for all of us that we cannot keep these feasts together, or with our customary splendor! We can be sure that Christ is raised from the dead, leading all its captives free, regardless of how full the church is this year; and we will want to celebrate again as if it were Easter when we finally all come back together. We can all look forward to a great celebration then, with all the bells and whistles — but in the meantime, take heart: Christ is risen from the dead even now, and just as he appeared to his disciples in the locked upper room where they were hiding in fear, so he makes his presence known to each of us wherever we are, even alone in our rooms.

Isolation, Loss, and Doing Something

In the midst of all this, I'm hearing from everyone (and experiencing myself) what a great loss this all is, and we're all grieving — not just that we can't be together on Sundays, but a whole range of things having to do, at core, with what it means to be a human person, and the life-giving relationships of varying sorts and categories that humanity entails. We all feel the urge to “do something,” either to help directly or to bear the burden in some other way, rather than simply staying at home. In the end this may be the biggest cross we are asked to bear: wanting to help and not finding any satisfying avenue in which to do it. This is its own kind of unrequited love, and it is deeply painful like any other.

But please remember: by staying home to prevent the spread of infection, we actively save lives, more effectively than by anything else we might contemplate doing. Read this article for some further encouragement on what active good you are doing by staying home: (<https://www.vox.com/2020/3/19/21186750/coronavirus-covid-19-social-distancing-staying-home-saving-lives>)

Furthermore, it may do us all some good to come to grips with our inability to “do something” — I hope it will introduce us to that deeper humility in which we are prepared to receive grace from God, from one another, and from ourselves; and I hope it will turn us all the more to prayer, in which we are put in touch with the Spirit who searches all things, to bind them together in love.

With love and prayers,

Fr. Blake

Senior Warden's Report

Dear Friends-

The news keeps coming fast and furious. One week we are asked not to intinct in receiving communion, a few days later we are informed that there will be no wine at all and a few days after that, that there will be no physical gathering at St. Mark's, and any other church in the diocese. And now we find ourselves under a shelter in place order, with the physical plant of St. Mark's closed. It is a time of ever-changing landscapes and uncertainty — as if we have fallen down the rabbit hole where things change so rapidly that all reality is upended. The one constant however, is God's love and our love for one another. Whether we meet in person, or over live stream, St. Mark's is still the same strong and courageous community we have always been. And being that strong community, please know, please be reassured, that the spiritual body of St. Mark's is open for business, and that the day to day work of the parish continues, though in a very altered form from that we are used to seeing. The vestry met via Zoom last night — the Worship Committee via Zoom the night before. Hot Meals will happen this Saturday, giving to-go bags to guests and working to insure the safety of both guests and volunteers.

And, as part of the business of St. Mark's, we still must pay bills (light, gas, insurance, etc.), and most importantly, we still must meet payroll for our rector and staff — Blake, George, Toni and Joel - who have adjusted so fluidly — and with amazing fortitude and creativity — to all the changes being asked of them. A good amount of our budget is dependent upon, not only pledges, but on the loose offering we receive each Sunday. The curtailment of physical services has certainly impacted our normal flow of funds. As Father Blake has said, we are more dependent than ever on your gifts. For those of you who usually place your pledge or a loose offering into the offering plate, we ask that you please mail your donation to the church office - St. Mark's, 2300 Bancroft Way, Berkeley, CA 94704. If you would like to make a pledge or a donation online please use this link to do so — <https://stmarksberkeley.org/donate/>

Your pledge or donation is so very important during this time, and so very much appreciated. These are strange and trying times — but we will see them through, and help each other see them through. And, having stood together in community at a social distance— we will be able to stand together again once this has passed, face to face, and celebrate each other, our community and all the blessings we enjoy as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Faithfully yours,

Lisa