

**SIGNS OF LIFE: WHY CHURCH MATTERS  
USING YOUR BEAN  
ASH WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 26, 2020  
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What should we make of the biggest news story of 2020 so far, the coronavirus?  
Or, as it is officially called now, COVID-19.

It's this: humans can lose perspective even faster than they can jump to conclusions.

8,000 children die every day from malnutrition,<sup>1</sup>

and 3,000 kids in America die every year from gun violence,<sup>2</sup>

but we haven't gotten excited about those very preventable deaths.

In terms of the flu, in a typical season just in the US, 36,000 people die.<sup>3</sup>

On a planet of almost 8 billion people, not even 3,000 have died from COVID-19.<sup>4</sup>

Let's be smart, of course, but let's also find some perspective. Don't panic.

Ironically, though, this panic about a new germ helps me make a point:

We're all in this together – whether we like it or not.

We happen to be sharing life on the planet in this moment in time,

We are all part of something larger than our individual lives.

On the one hand, the only life we can actually live is our own.

We make the decisions, adopt the attitudes,

and take on the habits and practices that shape the nature of our existence.

On the other hand, almost everything we think, say and do

is going to affect someone else, immediately or eventually.

In describing us as members of one body, different but connected,

Paul helps us see we are both supported by and responsible to others.

The great focus of Lent, the invitation we are given to observe a holy Lent,

is to be intentional about how we live in this body –

our personal body, our physical selves,

as members of the human family, with whom we are all connected,

and, specifically for us, as members of the Body of Christ.

This Lent at the Church of the Good Shepherd, we are focusing on LIFE,

the Signs of Life that we share with each other in community,

and on why CHURCH MATTERS – the importance of gathering together

in community to hear God's word, to share the sacraments,

to help each other find ways to live life intentionally,

ways that align us with the kind of life Jesus lived:

that care for the lives of those around us, that care for our selves,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.foodaidfoundation.org/world-hunger-statistics.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thetrace.org/2019/08/children-teens-gun-deaths-data/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.deseret.com/opinion/2020/1/30/21114323/coronavirus-flu-deaths-china-united-states-vaccines>

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019%E2%80%932020\\_coronavirus\\_outbreak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019%E2%80%932020_coronavirus_outbreak) (as of 02/26/2020)

that care for the lives of those coming after us.

You should all have one of these handouts – let's look at the front.

This Lenten journey is brought to us by our friends at SSJE,  
the Society of Saint John the Evangelist, a group of Episcopal monks,  
and by an Episcopal seminary, VTS.

They've provided a wealth of resources for our Lenten discipline,  
listed on the inside flap.

There are videos, meditations, and weekly thoughts  
on each of the 5 signs of life we'll focus over the next 5 weeks.

These good folks have also melded the Signs of Life  
with Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's emphasis on The Way of Love,  
which is a set of practices to develop a Jesus-centered life.

It may seem overwhelming, but we don't have to figure all this out for ourselves!

Open it up, and we have a calendar of ideas for simple but thoughtful practices  
for the days of Lent leading up to Holy Week.

Besides the calendar we've given you, you might use the Ash Wednesday bulletin,  
which I encourage you to take home.

In the bulletin are the readings and prayers that tie the Lenten themes together,  
and a rich and provocative source of Lenten focus: the Litany of Lenten Pilgrimage.

As I've said for years,

the Litany in the Ash Wednesday service in our *Book of Common Prayer*,  
seems to be all about the past and regret, and we can't do anything about  
things we've done wrong in the past but feel bad.

If we spend 40 days thinking about how awful we've BEEN,  
and a simple rule of life is that we get more of what we pay attention to,  
by the end of 40 days we're going to feel . . . MORE AWFUL.

If we spend 40 days focusing on ways to love and live like Jesus,  
by the end of 40 days, we're going to feel . . . MORE ALIVE in Christ.

So, we've rephrased the petitions in the Litany  
to focus on the kind of repentance that doesn't mean to feel bad,  
but to TURN, to go a new way: the way of Love, the way of Life,  
the way of Jesus.

You might pick one of the petitions in the Litany of Lenten Pilgrimage  
to work on – for a day, a week, or all of Lent – to bring you closer  
to being of one heart and mind in Christ.

With this intentionality, we also have a joint goal: to use our beans.

Our beans, of course, are our heads; we need to use our heads to achieve a goal.  
but as someone who doesn't eat anything with feet,

I like the kind of bean that grows on plants, too.

Beans are a big source of protein for me. I love them.

One of my favorite dishes is bean soup with lots of different kinds of beans.

During Lent this year, week by week, we're going to ask you to take some beans, one for each day of the upcoming week, to remind you use your bean, to be thoughtful and intentional about your Jesus-centered journey of Lent. Each day that you do something, anything intentional to live and love like Jesus, put a bean in a second pile.

Each Sunday, bring the beans that represent the Lenten practices you did and we'll put them all together in a tall cylinder.

And, yes, if you miss a week and don't get beans from us, you can use your own beans and bring those in.

I do recommend you use dried beans, though, not canned.

On March 29<sup>th</sup>, we'll make multi-bean soup for Coffee Hour using the amount of beans you've brought back over the weeks. (Ewww . . . Don't worry, we'll use new beans!)

As I said at the beginning, each person counts, AND we're all in this together.

If 15 beans come back, well, it will be mighty poor eating.

If pounds and pounds of beans come back, we'll have a feast to nourish the Body of Christ here – and maybe enough to share – maybe freeze some for our freezer ministry.

This Lent, use your bean to explore the Signs of Life, to follow the Way of Love, and to prepare with joy for the paschal feast on Easter.

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#### **COLLECT OF THE DAY:**

Almighty and everliving God, you hate nothing you have made and you forgive all who are penitent. During these forty days and forty nights, create in us new and honest hearts that deeply repent of the sins of our past. Prepare us to be restored to you in full pardon and forgiveness on the joyous day when we proclaim that our Lord is risen indeed, and has trampled sin and death underfoot forever. We pray for courage and strength to spend this Lenten season walking ever more closely with Jesus Christ our Lord, who was tested in every way as we are, yet did not sin.

#### **NEHEMIAH 8:1-8 [PORTIONS]**

All the people gathered together in the area in front of the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the scribe to bring out the Instruction scroll from Moses, according to which the Lord had instructed Israel.

Facing the area in front of the Water Gate, he read it aloud, from early morning until the middle of the day. He read it in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand, and everyone listened attentively to the Instruction scroll.

The Levites helped the people to understand the Instruction while the people remained in their places. They read aloud from the scroll, the Instruction from God, explaining and interpreting it so the people could understand what they heard.

#### **PSALM 51:1-18**

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving kindness; in your great compassion blot out my offenses.

**Wash me through and through from my wickedness, and cleanse me from my sin.**

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

**Against you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.**

And so you are justified when you speak and upright in your judgment.

**Indeed, I have been wicked from my birth, a sinner from my mother's womb.**

For behold, you look for truth deep within me, and will make me understand wisdom secretly.

**Purge me from my sin, and I shall be pure; wash me, and I shall be clean indeed.**

Make me hear of joy and gladness, that the body you have broken may rejoice.

**Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.**

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

**Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.**

Give me the joy of your saving help again and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.

**I shall teach your ways to the wicked, and sinners shall return to you.**

Deliver me from death, O God, and my tongue shall sing of your righteousness, O God of my salvation.

**Open my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.**

Had you desired it, I would have offered sacrifice, but you take no delight in burnt offerings.

**The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.**

### **1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-19, 27-28, 31A**

Christ is just like the human body—a body is a unit and has many parts; and all the parts of the body are one body, even though there are many. We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jew or Greek, or slave or free, and we all were given one Spirit to drink. Certainly the body isn't one part but many. If the foot says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not a hand," does that mean it's not part of the body? If the ear says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not an eye," does that mean it's not part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, what would happen to the hearing? And if the whole body were an ear, what would happen to the sense of smell? But as it is, God has placed each one of the parts in the body just like he wanted. If all were one and the same body part, what would happen to the body?

You are the body of Christ and parts of each other. In the church, God has appointed first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, the ability to help others, leadership skills, different kinds of tongues.

Use your ambition to try to get the greater gifts.

### **MATTHEW 16:13-25**

Now when Jesus came to the area of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Human One is?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the other prophets."

He said, "And what about you? Who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Then Jesus replied, "Happy are you, Simon son of Jonah, because no human has shown this to you. Rather my Father who is in heaven has shown you. I tell you that you are Peter. And I'll build my church on this rock. The gates of the underworld won't be able to stand against it. I'll give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Anything you fasten on earth will be fastened in heaven. Anything you loosen on earth will be loosened in heaven." Then he ordered the disciples not to tell anybody that he was the Christ.

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and legal experts, and that he had to be killed and raised on the third day. Then Peter took hold of Jesus and, scolding him, began to correct him: "God forbid, Lord! This won't happen to you." But he turned to Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan. You are a stone that could make me stumble, for you are not thinking God's thoughts but human thoughts."

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me will find them."

**SEQUENCE HYMN:** *Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud*

### **BLESSING:**

Our Triune God gives us the signs of life, equipping, empowering, and strengthening us to become disciples of Christ Jesus. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, bless you today and throughout these forty days.