

**FAITH MEANS ACTION**  
**SIGNS OF LIFE: WHY CHURCH MATTERS - FOOD**  
**THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT – MARCH 15, 2020**  
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I think the English language is amazing!

In the past week, we've developed new vocabulary words and phrases that so aptly describe the remarkable reality of a pandemic, something 99% of us weren't thinking about just a month ago.

Phrases most of us outside the discipline of epidemiology hadn't heard of before March 1<sup>st</sup> are now common vocabulary.

Two examples: "Social distancing" and "flatten the curve."

Marvelous terms! They are pithy, descriptive and actionable.

Both put words to why many of our people are staying home today.

"Social distancing" is a simple way of saying "I can't catch a germ I haven't been near."

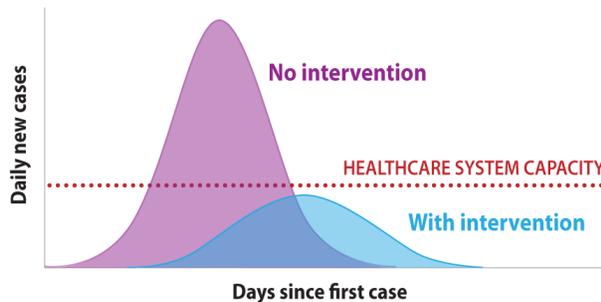
It boils a whole paragraph on good self-care down to 2 words.

"Flatten the curve" describes the impact of social distancing on an entire population:

We'll have lots of sick people very quickly, overwhelming the health care system  
**UNLESS** we practice social distancing and good hygiene.

### FLATTENING THE CURVE

*A look at the importance of slowing the spread of a virus, so that the rate of infection doesn't outpace the resources to fight against it.*



SOURCE: CDC

THE CANADIAN PRESS

If we do practice the recommended interventions, we won't make each other sick, or at least not as quickly, and our health care system will be able to care for those who do fall ill.

"Flatten the curve" boils a whole statistical concept and a practical way to love our neighbor down to three understandable words.

Also marvelous is how words that are thousands of years old also have something to say to us at this particular time.

Isaiah tells us that people of faith **MUST** take care of other people.

James tells us that people of faith **MUST** take care of other people.

Faith may begin in our heads and hearts, but until it reaches our hands and feet and hits the street, it's just us doing whatever **WE** feel like doing.

For **ALL** of us, faith in action means washing our hands and doing whatever else we can to stop the spread of germs that may not affect us, but might destroy someone else.

Now, again, sometimes, like during a pandemic, for those at high risk, hitting the street actually means staying home even if you don't **WANT** to.

**NOT** getting sick is the best way to help everyone.

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For others, hitting the street means calling the homebound:  
are they OK? do they want a chat? Do they need food?

Our Signs of Life focus today is food.

I have to say that a visit to Publix has shown us what happens  
when people do NOT focus on the signs of life:

If Isaiah were preaching today, he would be yelling at the ME FIRST folks  
who went to the store and bought a year's worth of food,  
leaving nothing for those who came after them.

Dawn Gordon, our Parish Administrator,  
got a call from a friend in Michigan who said the Kroger near her  
simply shut its doors: there was nothing left to sell but hairspray.

People act this way when they go on a feeding frenzy – not of physical gluttony,  
but the emotional gluttony of feasting on fear.

If we're going to have a feeding frenzy today, it needs to be on the Word of God.

The message from God is consistent through the eons: DO NOT BE AFRAID.

Be faithful. Be kind. Be generous. Love your neighbor.

Do to others as you would have them do to you.

I want you to notice something in today's psalm.

Often in the psalms, when people are hungry in the wilderness,  
the storyline is that God sends manna from heaven, as we heard in the Gospel.

That's a lot like magic and, well, whatever, hard to relate to.

But in THIS psalm, God guides the people in the wilderness to . . . a city.

God sends them to other people, to the shared resources of a community.

This 3,000 year-old psalm speaks a truth for today: We are all in this together.

WE are to be THAT CITY, the community that cares for each other  
and for the strangers that God sends to us.

We, the church, are to welcome those who come to us for life.

Which brings us straight to the Gospel lesson. Jesus says, "Whoever comes to me will never go hungry."

The Church is the Body of Christ today; the Church is to be Jesus to the world today.

The food we give might be very literal, like the gifts for Dunedin Cares on the side altar today,  
or it might be more intangible, like companionship, financial assistance,  
or doing chores and errands for the homebound.

We also give the kind of food that can't be found anywhere

but in a community of faith: a feast of hope, the promise of eternal life.

Eternal life is not only life with God after we die,

but sharing in the life of the Eternal One right here and right now

as we listen to message of God through the eons: DO NOT BE AFRAID.

Instead, eat the Bread of Life, which is to go into action,

to live the way Isaiah, Jesus and James taught us to live:

Do God's will on earth as it is done in heaven.

Be the city shining on the hill where the thirsty are satisfied  
and the hungry are filled with good things.

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

O God, who by the abundance of your Son all Creation is nourished and satisfied: Grant us, we pray, a holy hunger to be filled with your good things, and food for the leanness of our souls; through the bread of eternal life, Jesus Christ our Lord.

#### **ISAIAH 58:1-11**

Shout loudly; don't hold back; raise your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their crime, to the house of Jacob their sins. They seek me day after day, desiring knowledge of my ways like a nation that acted righteously, that didn't abandon their God. They ask me for righteous judgments, wanting to be close to God. "Why do we fast and you don't see; why afflict ourselves and you don't notice?" Yet on your fast day you do whatever you want, and oppress all your workers. You quarrel and brawl, and then you fast; you hit each other violently with your fists. You shouldn't fast as you are doing today if you want to make your voice heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I choose, a day of self-affliction, of bending one's head like a reed and of lying down in mourning clothing and ashes? Is this what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?

Isn't this the fast I choose: releasing wicked restraints, untying the ropes of a yoke, setting free the mistreated, and breaking every yoke? Isn't it sharing your bread with the hungry and bringing the homeless poor into your house, covering the naked when you see them, and not hiding from your own family? Then your light will break out like the dawn, and you will be healed quickly. Your own righteousness will walk before you, and the Lord's glory will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and God will say, "I'm here."

If you remove the yoke from among you, the finger-pointing, the wicked speech; if you open your heart to the hungry, and provide abundantly for those who are afflicted, your light will shine in the darkness, and your gloom will be like the noon. The Lord will guide you continually and provide for you, even in parched places. He will rescue your bones. You will be like a watered garden, like a spring of water that won't run dry.

#### **PSALM 107:1-9**

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, and his mercy endures for ever.

**Let all those whom the LORD has redeemed proclaim  
that he redeemed them from the hand of the foe.**

He gathered them out of the lands; from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

**Some wandered in desert wastes; they found no way to a city where they might dwell.**

They were hungry and thirsty; their spirits languished within them.

**Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.**

He put their feet on a straight path to go to a city where they might dwell.

**Let them give thanks to the LORD for his mercy and the wonders he does for his children.**

For he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.

#### **JAMES 2:14-20**

My brothers and sisters, what good is it if people say they have faith but do nothing to show it? Claiming to have faith can't save anyone, can it? Imagine a brother or sister who is naked and never has enough food to eat. What if one of you said, "Go in peace! Stay warm! Have a nice meal!"? What good is it if you don't actually give them what their body needs? In the same way, faith is dead when it doesn't result in faithful activity.

Someone might claim, "You have faith and I have action." But how can I see your faith apart from your actions? Instead, I'll show you my faith by putting it into practice in faithful action. It's good that you believe that God is one. Ha! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble with fear. Are you so slow? Do you need to be shown that faith without actions has no value at all?

#### **JOHN 6:29-40**

Jesus replied, "This is what God requires, that you believe in him whom God sent."

They asked, "What miraculous sign will you do, that we can see and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, just as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat."

Jesus told them, "I assure you, it wasn't Moses who gave the bread from heaven to you, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. The bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

They said, "Sir, give us this bread all the time!"

Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But I told you that you have seen me and still don't believe. Everyone whom the Father gives to me will come to me, and I won't send away anyone who comes to me. I have come down from heaven not to do my will, but the will of him who sent me. This is the will of the one who sent me, that I won't lose anything he has given me, but I will raise it up at the last day. This is my Father's will: that all who see the Son and believe in him will have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."

**SEQUENCE HYMN:** *I Am the Bread of Life*

**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.