

One of my earliest memories is of planting marigolds with my mother. We started them indoors, in egg containers. My mother *showed me the way* to poke a hole in the soil and drop the seed in. Then we covered the tops and watered them before leaving them in a sunny spot. I took that learning and shared it with Sunday School children years later.

During Lent, we planted seeds in paper cups. Each child wrote their name on the cup. The hope was that, by Easter, there would be new growth springing forward and each child would have a plant to take home. Several weeks into the project, there were still a number of cups without seedlings sprouting.

Since I like to be prepared (and I didn't want children to be disappointed), I had secretly planted extra seeds that were sprouting, so one evening, I went to the Sunday School room to swap them out. I reached in with a spoon to dig a hole for the plant I was going to put in, and lo and behold, there was a tiny little stem emerging. I put it back. The next cup showed me something similar. And on and on. There was growth. It was happening. I just couldn't see it. You see, instead of having the kids poke holes in the soil, I'd had them use pencils and some of the seeds were almost all the way at the bottom of the cup. I remember shaking my head and saying out loud, "oh, ye of little faith!" I share this story today to remind us that God is at work even if we can't see it. And God's time isn't always our time.

It may seem strange that several weeks after Easter, that we're studying a Bible passage from a time before the Resurrection, but it's so appropriate for today!

The fancy term for this passage is "a farewell discourse" and Jesus tells the disciples that he'll be leaving. He's preparing them that things are going to be different for a bit..and he's leaving them with hope.

We are living in a time when much about our daily lives is different, but we can also have hope! Jesus says, don't be afraid and don't let your hearts be troubled. The head is tied to logic and reason, but the heart is tied to emotion and connection. Don't let your hearts be troubled.

Jesus knows that losing a relationship is cause for you to be heartsick or despondent. Just as he gave hope to his disciples, he gives it to us today. Don't be afraid of the future. Don't let your hearts be troubled. Oh boy, if there were ever something we needed to hear right now-today-that's it.

Jesus tells them that despite change, there is continuity; even though they'll be apart, they will remain connected, and not only that, but at some point, they will be together again.

Today's passage is from the gospel of John which says that in the beginning God and Jesus were together and because God so loved the world that he sent Jesus here. In this passage, Jesus is preparing his disciples for the reality that he's leaving them and returning home to God. This space was the space of his life.

It occurs to me that life itself is a liminal place; a transitional place. Between **where we were** before we got here and **where we're going**. We came into this life, **largely unaware** of all that was being done for us...largely unaware of what was going on around us. Think of a newborn. That baby isn't picking its own outfits or consciously watching the news, even though it is

dressed and a parent may hold the baby while the news is on. It's not aware of what is happening to sustain its life.

When I was a baby, I may not have known my father, but he knew me. In fact, he prepared a place for me. A bassinet with a gold crown sitting on top of it. He made that for me and it was there when I came home from the hospital. And here's that crown today. A little worse for the wear, but not too shabby considering its age.

My parents are both gone, but I know that they both live on in me and that there's continuity between this life and the next. Jesus speaks to that. While the disciples are still here on earth, muddled and confused, and grieving and adapting, he's elsewhere, doing things for their benefit—preparing a place for them so they can all be together again.

This is important for us today. Things are happening right now, for our benefit, even though we're not necessarily aware of what's happening. This is true here on earth, with leaders and task forces preparing protocols for reopening and developing new ways of doing things.

It's also true of heaven, that place where Jesus is. Even right now, he's thinking of each of us, readying our space. I pray that the hope of continuity and, more, the hope of ongoing relationship with each other and Christ bring you deep peace. It doesn't matter if you're alone in your house, you're not alone because Jesus is with you. Like Jesus told his disciples, and I'm paraphrasing, "You are together, but apart".

On that note, I wish that were the CDC's messaging for the Coronavirus. Social distancing is actually physical distancing. We can still be social! I'm not really a fan of "Alone together". I'd rather it was what it actually is, "Together, though Apart".

I keep hearing people talking about wanting to get 'back to' the way things were. Believe me, I want to spend time with friends and family. I want to spend the summer on the beach, and visit with friends and go out to dinner. I want to go see a show at the Playhouse and browse for antiques at Brimfield and take the trip to Fort Lauderdale that I had planned. I want to see you at church, to have the children gather up front, to hear the choir sing, and to shake your hands on the way out....but that's not all going to happen for some time.

And when the world opens back up, it will be different. Let me name the very real grief associated with this realization. We've been sitting in a place of anticipatory grief for months. And the disciples were there, too. You can see that they're starting to be unsettled. I can almost hear them, "What do you mean? Where are you going? How do we get there? Show us something we can hang on to and we'll be okay." In this place today, we're also longing for something to hang on to. On this Mother's Day, maybe you want it to be as it was in years past. Gathered with extended family for a big meal, sitting shoulder to shoulder at the table. Just show me in the crystal ball when we can gather again and I can get through this. This place of not knowing is difficult. And it would be absurd to think that grief isn't affecting every facet of our lives. Let's hold that grief for a moment in this space of sacred connection. This is a hard time. Jesus says, Do not be afraid. You believe in God. Believe also in me. Trust me. There's more.

Jesus tells them they already have the map to journey to the next place, but they don't see it and they don't understand. It's not a paper map. It's not a Google map. It's a way. I'm going to

suggest that following that way and taking that path could help us as we navigate our way through the Coronavirus crisis. That way is one of patience. Endurance. Compassion. The direction you use is one of kindness, one that provides a voice for the marginalized and protection for the vulnerable. The path is one of acceptance. The way of forgiveness. It's the direction of peace even amid tension. You know the way. You have to go the way. That means that your thoughts and speech and actions will take you closer toward Jesus (or further away). It's always your choice.

When Jesus says no one comes to the Father except through me, I don't believe that he's being a gatekeeper or bouncer, but instead throwing open the doors and offering a way. Many, many years ago, I was supposed to take my sister to a concert, but I had to work that night. My boss was going to the concert and he offered to take my sister. When she got home that night she told me that she'd been backstage. I asked to see her backstage pass, but she said she didn't need one. My boss 'was' the backstage pass. He simply said, 'she's with me'. That's what I think Jesus says, too. They're with me. All those who take steps on the way.

If we follow his way and the path that he gave us, we'll have his guidance not just 'to' the next life, but 'through' this life. Through the hard times. Through the painful, difficult, and challenging times. We'll do what he did, because he's helping us. Strengthening us. If we ask for something in his name, it's as though we're calling forth his very presence. Things are happening even if we can't see them. Our time isn't always the same as God's time. As we move forward through this lifetime, we have Christ's assurance that we are not forgotten and that, even now, he's getting whatever is next ready for us. We're together, even though we're apart. As to what's the next phase of our lives and our world, well friends, we have a beautiful and sacred opportunity to co-create that with God. I invite you to think about what it means to 'be the church'. Your holy homework is to think of ways we can 'be the church' in this time while we are together, though apart. What new needs are emerging in the world and how can we serve them? Are there systems that we've been supporting that are blatantly broken? What can we do? You see, right now, we are being transformed and we can transform the world. How? We already know the way. We just have to remember. As you re-member or regather in the face of these new circumstances, be gentle with yourself. It's all new. I'll close with a beautiful poem by Maya Stein. I'm using it with her permission. It's called [advice for the newly hatched](#)

Later, you will admire the tree you came from – its artistic notches, the flourish of branch and bark, the sweet density of leaf and blanket of shade, how the view often tilted in your favor – skyward – where clouds drifted into whatever shapes you wanted them to be. You will tell stories of your past in the way of myth, each vignette pearlescent as dew. You will pluck good fruit from the old stems, and the skin will still be soft and yielding. For now, though, offer your betrothal to this strange, quaking new body. Admire the heated voltage of your fear, your blood circling the drain. Remember you are merely at the outskirts of your own ballast, that the swaying will go on for awhile, and then it won't, and then it will again. This is and isn't the beginning. This is and isn't the end. (MayaStein.com)

As I bless you out, Remember there is continuity. Remember that things are happening even now, all around us—even within us—though we don't see it yet. Go about your day, following Christ's path, his way. When you do, you live the light, you give the light and you bring heaven to earth. Amen.