

**All Saints' Memorial Church, Navesink, New Jersey**  
*A Letter from Mother Debbie*  
*May 23, 2020*

*Turn, O LORD! How long? Have compassion on your servants!* (Psalm 90:13)

In the Book of Psalms, there are many psalms of lament—psalms of complaint, cry, anger, and sorrow directed to God. And within scripture itself, lament is prevalent from the cry of the Israelites during Exodus, the laments of the many prophets, and even a lament from Jesus over the people and city of Jerusalem. God is worthy of our praise and thanks—but also is open to and hears our many laments, including the many that are no doubt being lifted now.

I too lament: the loss of Holy Week services and Easter, not being able to gather for in-person worship, fellowship, formation, events. As a society, we are dealing with massive amounts of grief: grieving the loss of 'normality', routines, co workers, or fellow students, incomes. Those who were looking forward to weddings and graduations and baptisms and first communions—or even a special play or recital or sporting event—all feel the loss. For some, the grief and loss runs deeper: loss of a loved one's life, not even being able to celebrate their life in our usual rites of funeral and gatherings.

Grief, if not acknowledged and dealt with, can affect us in several ways: depression, addictions or substance abuse, anger, violence. Some overfunction, seeking to control all other aspects of their lives; others are mired in the loss, and have a hard time seeing a way out. Many vacillate between these and all other spots along the way. That goes for me as well.

The pain of grief makes us uncomfortable, it can makes us feel helpless. I get that. And so that's why we will do a lot of things to avoid it—including pushing on and pretending that we are fine, all is fine. But wishing doesn't make it so. And this virus—well, we cannot wish it or order it away. It is here; and while right now, after many weeks of social distancing and stay at home orders, it is at lower levels of spread—it is still present. Waiting. It is a patient and persistent foe. It counts on our frustration, our impatience, in order to keep on thriving.

We must be smarter than that. And that means hanging in, and doing those things that limit spread, even when they are uncomfortable, even when they remind us of all our loss and stir up that grief. We, as God's people, do lament—but we do so in faith, and in love. And because we love, we express our concern for the other by doing all we can to keep this virus from resurging, from spreading.

There have been many inquiries about when the church buildings will reopen. The short answer is—I do not know. We cannot open without Diocesan approval—no matter what the President or Governor says. The newly formed committee on 'Re-entering, Re-opening, and Re-imagining' is working on guidelines to be shared soon—and after that, it is anticipated that each parish must use those guidelines to come up with a plan that must be submitted and approved by the Diocese. Likely any plan will be in stages, and subject to health and safety recommendations. Please know that while I am looking forward to seeing you all again in

person, I will not jeopardize the safety of our community members. I will not allow grief and anxiety to lead in decision making. That is my responsibility as your Rector, priest and pastor.

The Church, as you have heard me say and write many times before, is not the buildings; it is the community of God. Regardless of whether we gather virtually or in person, pray in our homes or yards or eventually, gathered in our building—we are ‘open’. Yes, right now, it feels different, and that difference, that change, is a source of a feeling of loss. But it doesn’t change the reality that the church still IS—and it is not reliant on buildings or laws or anything else. The Church is reliant only on God in Christ, and we as baptized members living out that mission in our lives. The Church is essential—and is open. Our Diocesan Facebook page banner says it well (and it is not an unique statement): *‘While we can’t meet as a church, we can BE the church.’*

We have and always will ‘be the church’—buildings open or closed. Worship virtual or not. As long as we love—that *agape* love that Jesus showed forth on the cross—we are living out the mission of the church.

*Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.*  
*(1 Corinthians 13:4-8a)*

In peace,

*Mother Debbie+*