

**Pandemic Diary**  
**Installment 17**  
**April 4, 2020**

Dear Friends,

On this day in 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King gave one his most dramatic and stirring sermons. He concluded it with the following words; "We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter to me now because I've been to the mountaintop. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. . . . [But] I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." The next day, he was assassinated.

Dr. King lived each day of his life with the threat of death. Yet he spoke boldly of the rights of all people. He was unafraid because he knew that when his race was finished he would receive his heavenly reward. In these troubled days we can have this same courage.

I highly recommend today's 'Our Daily Bread' reading (for April 3rd). The author speaks not only of Dr. King but also the Apostle Paul who wrote in II Timothy that he was joyful even if he died for he had finished his race. Death has become a part of our daily lives. Yet so is eternal life. No person or no virus can diminish glory of the Lord.

In Christ,

Pastor Paul

P.S. Copies of Daily Bread and a selection of Easter devotionals can be found in a basket outside the parking lot door of our church.



**Pandemic Diary**  
**Installment 16**  
**April 3, 2020**

Dear Friends,

To help fill the long hours at home Laura and I have been watching more television. One of the shows that has caught our imagination is one called, "The Wall".

It is a game show, but is different than most. The contestants come from varied and very deserving backgrounds. Many of them are veterans, teachers, doctors, and first responders. All have intriguing stories. Through various quizzes and chances as well as decisions on their parts they have a chance to win a great deal of money. But if they choose incorrectly or the ball bounces badly they end up with nothing.

Last night the show was particularly heart breaking. The contestants were two brothers who were part-time pastors and also ran a charity food bank. Recently their church had been robbed. If they did well on the show it would help them and help their community. Well, they had the worst luck. I have never seen such bad luck. In the end they left with nothing. It tugged at my heart as the two brothers stood face to face assuring each other that they still felt blessed despite their bad luck. I pray the show might bring them back for another try.

As a country and a world we have been given some bad breaks recently. But we still need to feel blessed. God still loves us and God is still in control. Oh, by the way I strongly recommend watching "The Wall". It will make you cry, it will make you smile.

In Christ,

Pastor Paul



**Pandemic Diary**  
**Installment 15**  
**April 2, 2020**

Dear Friends,

If you want to read a bible verse that will bring a smile to your face in these dark times, look at Romans 16. In it Paul lists all the people in the Roman Church that he wants to greet and is thankful for. It is a list of 40 people! The list includes men and women, Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, elderly and young. I can just imagine him smiling as he wrote one name after another, not wanting to forget anyone. As he wrote one he would suddenly think of another name, which would remind him of someone else.

When I was serving a church in Mount Storm, the church decided it was time to give out certificates to all the people who had worked so hard to keep the church going. At the start they were just going to honor one or two people. But soon the list grew and grew. Soon we decided to have a dinner in which everyone got a certificate. We knew how Paul felt.

Paul was writing to the church in Rome. He had not yet traveled to Rome but he knew many of them and knew them well. Each name includes a little message a little story or memory. He concludes by saying that they should give each other a holy kiss (hug) since he wasn't there to do it himself. I miss seeing all of you each week and I owe you all a holy hug. Laura likes to say after she talks to someone that she is "Keeping track of the hugs she is missing and will pay up when this is all over." She and Paul were on the same page.

Stay safe and healthy,

Pastor Paul

Give someone a "virtual hug" today!



P.S. From the treasurer, thank you to everyone that has been sending in offering, it is greatly appreciated. Our bank account has taken a hit from canceling services. Unfortunately, the bills are still coming in for utilities, insurance, and payroll. Please remember your church during this trying time.

**Pandemic Diary**  
**Installment 14**  
**April 1, 2020**

Dear Friends,

Here is a great scripture passage:

**"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order  
that you may know the hope to which you were called"**  
**Ephesians 1:18**

I look around and I what I see does not give me much hope. The television news is full of images that are discouraging; over-crowded hospitals, vacant streets, and store shelves devoid of toilet paper and hand sanitizer. I am enjoying preaching online but it is sad to stand in front of empty pews. I think that each morning I will start by praying that God will open the eyes of my heart so I might see things that give me hope and not make me discouraged. I don't want to be naive or bury my head in the sand but I don't want to be pessimistic either.

There is a lot out there to look at and be hopeful:

~I saw a large red headed woodpecker at our bird feeder for the first time this year.

~I saw a picture taken from outer space. It was of China and showed how the air pollution had decreased since the start of the virus.

~I looked on the shelf in the bedroom and saw a picture of my wife and another picture of my newest grandson.

~One day I was awoken by the lightning and sounds of booming thunder.

What has God shown you with eyes of your heart? Allow God's Spirit to awaken you to wonders of his glory.

In Christ,

Pastor Paul



Enjoy this smile from God (and the birds)

**Dear Friends,**

**I keep looking for things that give me assurance that life will go on. That someday things will get back to normal. I have come up with a few.**

**Today I received a spam call. I hate spam calls but I had not had one for a week or so. Having one restored my faith that life will once again be normal, bothersome yes, but normal.**

**I spoke with Emilie Hogg and she told me that her chickens were laying eggs. The chickens aren't worried about Covid-19 and I wish we could follow their example.**

**I have an appointment to talk to an advisor about Medicare. I set it up before the virus and I may have to postpone but I am still getting older and I will still retire in a few months God willing.**

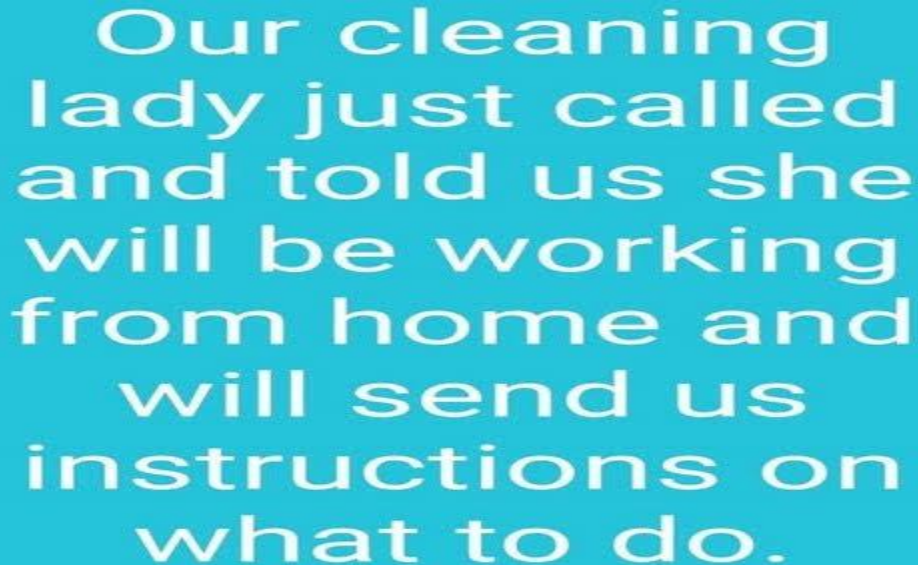
**Sunday night I called my 96 year old father and then I Skyped with my son and my 2 year old grandson. Both of their lives have been affected by the virus, but neither seem to be worried or changed by it.**

**Monday we went to Cole's Hardware to get crab grass prevention. Crab grass is as normal and regular as any of life's problems.**

**Life is going on and we have to as well.**

**Stay healthy,**

**Pastor Paul**



**Our cleaning lady just called and told us she will be working from home and will send us instructions on what to do.**



Dear Friends,

I read today about a group of churches that are holding worship at a drive in theater. What a great idea! The ingenuity of people is wonderful and the Kingdom of God is going strong.

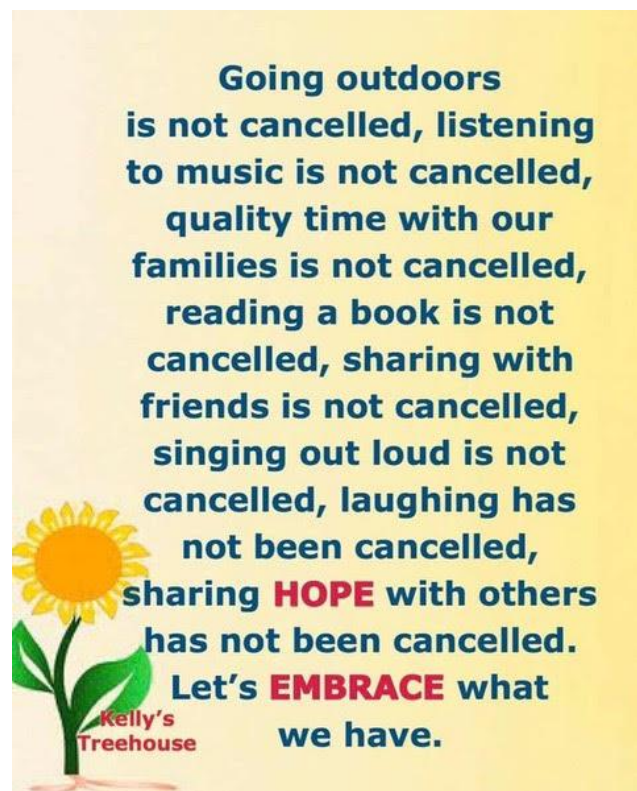
Our little church is not getting down, we are fighting back. We broadcast our second worship service on the internet this week. The first one was good, this was even better, and next week will be better yet.

Sunday we will celebrate Palm and Passion Sunday. Chris will play the organ and the internet broadcast will help bring our wonderful worship experience into your home, Maundy Thursday we will celebrate communion on the internet. The Lord's Supper will go viral. Stay tuned for instruction. On Good Friday we will be having our own sermon, music and prayer. Many of the other churches in the community will also have Good Friday worship that you can access online. Easter Sunday will be available online as well and I will be there, bunny ears and all.

This will be my last Easter as your pastor. It certainly is the most interesting Easter yet. I hope you will feel blessed.

In Christ,

Pastor Paul



**Pandemic Diary**

**Installment 11**

March 29, 2020

Dear Friends,

I read the following joke today:

Twenty Years Ago We Had:

Johnny Cash, Bob Hope and Steve Jobs,

Today We Have No Cash, No Hope, and No Jobs,

Please Don't Let Anything Happen to Kevin Bacon.

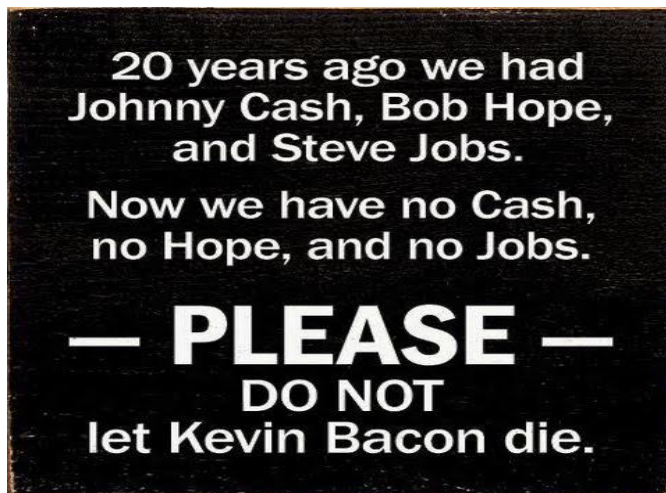
Two things will help us get through all this; humor and faith in God. We have an abundance of both.

It is Sunday morning and I turned on the TV to find a worship service to watch. I was disappointed. One pastor was standing there wearing a cowboy hat; I am sure he is a man of God but I just couldn't take him seriously. Another pastor was healing people by slapping them on the forehead and yelling. That was not my style either. I guess I will try YouTube.

Next Sunday is Palm Sunday and our YouTube feed will include something new and unique. Laura and I will be presenting a service that talks about Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday. It should be interesting - as soon as we write it. Just a note - neither of us will be wearing a cowboy hat.

Stay Healthy Stay Safe,

Pastor Paul



Dear Friends,

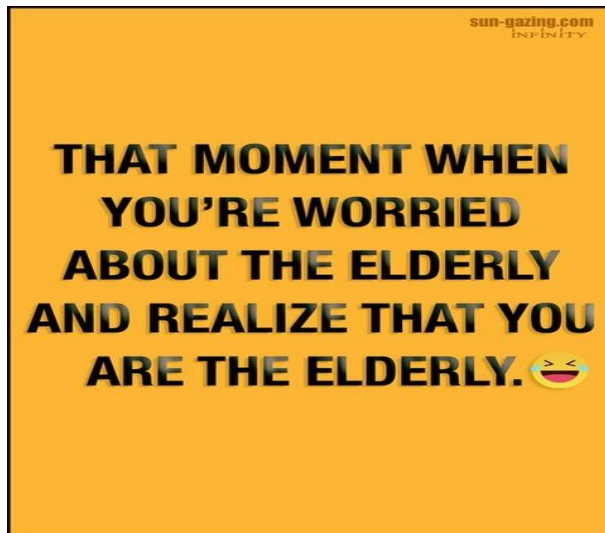
Today we had a new adventure. At six o'clock in the morning no less, we took Giant Market up on its senior citizen hours. This involved several painful realities. First, admitting that I was a senior citizen. I don't feel that way and rarely use that fact to my advantage, except for the senior menu at Perkins. But the offer to get first choice on grocery items with little competition was too hard to pass up. Arriving in the dark, Laura and I ventured inside where we found everything sanitized and well organized. We also found an electric grocery cart which was a help.

I ran behind Laura as she zoomed up and down largely empty aisles and finished in about an hour. Unfortunately there was only one open check-out line. So we decided to do something we rarely try, we went to self check-out line. I struggled to find the bar codes on many items but with the help of a very polite young clerk we made it. For those of you who are over 60 and can get up that early I recommend the experience. It's not perfect; the paper good section was largely sold out. But everything else was OK.

Continue to stay healthy and God Bless,

Pastor Paul

Just a reminder from the treasurer – If you would like to drop your offering at the church, there are Easter devotionals and Daily Breads sitting by the parking lot door. Take what you need. You can also mail your offering to 401 Main Street.





**Pandemic Diary**  
**Installment 9**  
**March 26, 2020**

Dear Friends,

One of the main casualties I have noticed during this crisis is my sanity. I have developed a bad case of hypochondria. Watching the news encourages this. I hear a list of the symptoms of the virus and I begin to develop them one symptom at a time. Last night I developed a splitting headache following the evening news. It is not just the news media either. Yesterday I read that someone who worked at Weis in Milton had tested positive for the virus. Ohhh man, my back hurt for awhile, I coughed at least twice, and I had a ten minute hot flash.

The good thing about all this is that unlike the virus, there is a cure; it is called Extra Strength Tylenol.

Amidst all the bad news there is always the good news of the gospel, Jesus came for sinners and hypochondriacs like me. Thank GOD!!!

In His Strength,

Pastor Paul

**Pandemic Diary**  
**Installment 8**  
**March 25, 2020**

Dear Friends,

Yesterday I participated in a Zoom meeting with members of the Presbytery, both lay and ordained. There were many topics discussed. The most interesting of which was: Should churches cancel Easter this year? These days many things have been canceled due to the virus, but what about Easter? The people in the discussion were rightfully indignant at the very suggestion but we came to the conclusion, "Easter Will Not Be Canceled!!" The Easter Sunrise Service may be canceled; the traditional Easter egg hunt may be canceled; we may not worship together on Easter morning, but Easter will go on.

After a short heated discussion several more salient points were brought up:

We can celebrate because Jesus is risen indeed. That is true and has been true over two thousand years. It has been true through wars, through famines, and it is still true.

We can celebrate because the tomb is still empty. We can go and see the tomb by ourselves or with hundreds of other people.

One interesting point was brought up in the discussion. We celebrate Easter each Sunday. Not just once a year. Sundays are the Lord's Day; the day of resurrection.

Easter is more than lilies and pretty clothes. It is more than crowded pews and rousing choir anthems. It is the assurance of eternal life and of God's love.

There is no doubt that this year will be the most unusual Easter that any of us can remember. But it will not be canceled whether we are in the sanctuary or not.

Stay Healthy and May God Bless You,

Pastor Paul

**Pandemic Diary**  
**Installment 7**  
**March 24, 2020**

Dear Friends,

Peggy Calabro, a member who lives at Watsontown Health and Rehab, told me a great story. Laura had sent her a sympathy card with a wonderful message and on the back were the words of an old hymn. She treasures this card. It sits on the table in her room. Before the quarantine, she requested that a guest musician sing the hymn that was inscribed on the back of the card. Little things can mean a lot to those in nursing homes, particularly at this time of crisis.

I can't visit the people in their rooms anymore but I do call them regularly. Something kind of humorous happens when I call them. When I ask them how they are doing being quarantined, they say it's nothing new. Nursing homes undergo closures two or three times a year for flu and other illnesses. When I comment that people don't come to visit, they tell me that isn't anything new either. Many of them rarely have visitors. Residents of nursing facilities seem to be adjusting better than many of us at home.

Take time to send a card or make a phone call. Let the friends we have in nursing and assisted living homes know they are loved and prayed for. Also call those that are isolated in their own homes for a chat and to check on them.

In Christ,

Pastor Paul



**Pandemic Diary**  
**Installment 6**  
**March 22, 2020**

Dear Friends,

Wow, what a weekend. Saturday I videotaped my sermon for the week. Thanks to the steady hand of Rob Brown and the support of Laura, the experience was wonderful. To my surprise many people have watched it on Face Book, people who I don't even know. It was not perfect. Some of the feedback, especially from my father, was helpful. I need to remember to look at the camera. I'm used to looking at the congregation. He reminded me that the congregation was not in the pews but at home at their computers. I will work hard on this but old habits are hard to break. I also discovered that the sermon and scripture were too long. Next week will be better, it will be on Psalm 23 and that is very short and familiar. I appreciate the support and the suggestions. Feel free to call and do either or both.

Rumors seem to abound. We were told that the President would shut down the whole country. So far that has not happened. Avoid believing rumors as well as passing them on.

We await a shipment from Chewy on Monday. If it doesn't come we may in trouble. Those familiar with our cats will understand.

I also went to the store twice, once at Weis and once at Lingle's. I got to Lingle's early while they were still stocking the shelves and found most items I needed. If you need go grocery shopping Lingle's is a good choice but get there early.

Stay safe and healthy,

Pastor Paul

P.S. The Financial Committee reports that a number of people either brought in or mailed their offering and a deposit was made. Thank you for remembering the church. Every little bit helps keep our church ready to serve you.

**Pandemic Diary**  
**Installment 5**  
**March 21, 2020**

Dear Friends,

I find myself increasingly bored and antsy. The result is I do a lot more complaining. When I really get feeling sorry for myself I think of one thing. As bad as things have gotten, it could be a lot worse. What would this have been like forty years ago?

There was no internet and computers were only in their infancy. Students would not be able to take classes online. I could not check my email or send out this message to all of you. There would have been conference calls but not Skype or online group communications. I could not stream my sermon. I would have to call up each of you and read you my sermon over the phone. Wouldn't that be fun? My "Smart TV"; my TV allows me to watch wonderful shows and of course reruns of To Tell the Truth and the Chase Australia.

The Corona virus has brought me kicking and screaming into the technological world of the twenty first century. I am confused, bewildered and totally loving it.

Oh come to think of it, there is another big change in forty years: home delivery. I am thankful to Amazon Prime, Schwan's, and, of course, Chewy. How did we ever survive without them?

Forty years and so much has changed, but not God. God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

May God Bless You and Keep You,

Pastor Paul

**Pandemic Diary**  
**Installment 4**  
**March 19, 2020**

Dear Friends,

On Wednesday Laura and I did something we had not done in months. She cooked a delicious meal and we sat down at the dining room table and had a long, even romantic meal. No fast food, no take out. This might be the most positive thing to come out of this disaster.

As the days of the crisis continue I am reminded of one of the great urban myths. It was claimed that during the huge power black-out of New York City that there was a marked increase in the birth of children nine months later. This myth was proved false and in fact the birth rate was actually less. Television stations have been wondering if there would be an increase in births nine months after the Corona Virus. Preliminary findings are not hopeful. In China, where the virus opened, the divorce rate has actually increased. I hope and pray people will truly come together. It has given us more time together with fewer distractions. Enjoy this time together with your loved ones and make time to reach out by phone or other electronic means to those in your community.

Keep safe

In Christ, Paul

**Pandemic Diary Part III**  
**March 18, 2020**

Dear Friends:

Hand washing has become an important part of our lives. There is an interesting debate about hand washing. What song should you sing while washing so that you wash for the required amount of time? I have some suggestions from a theological perspective. The song has to be short, about 30 seconds, it has to be one that people know, and it has to be spiritual and inspiring.

For years people suggested the ABC song or singing Happy Birthday through twice. But as Christians I think we can do better. How about:

"Whiter than Snow"

"Cleanse Me"

"Washed in the Blood"

"Peace Like a River"

"Deep and Wide"

"A Shelter in the Time of Storm."

"Amazing Grace"

"God Will Take Care of You"

I also thought of few that we should not include.

"Precious Lord Take My Hand"

"They'll know We Are Christians By Our Love" (Particularly the verse,  
"We will walk with each other we will walk hand in hand")

"Leaning on the Everlasting Arms"

And the songs which should be avoided at all costs are:

"Pass It On," and

"Breath on Me"

If you have any other suggestions please let me know. Meanwhile keep washing and keep singing praise to our Lord.

Stay Healthy,

Pastor Paul

P.S. The following quote is from Rick Wolfe:

"Stay close to God but away from Your Neighbor."



## **Pandemic Diary Part 2**

### **Installment Two**

**March 17th**

**Dear Church Friends and Members,**

**The media is encouraging everyone to stay at least three feet from each other and to avoid touching or coming into contact with others. This puts a crimp into my style as a pastor. I hug, shake hands, hold hands with people when praying and I put a hand a shoulder to encourage people. I am also now limited to where I can visit people. Nursing homes and hospitals are off limits except in emergencies. I am finding it increasingly hard to be a pastor in the time of the Corona Virus.**

**But there is a solution to the problems. Non physical support still is an option. I can talk and share at a safe distance, there are no problems with phones or computers and of course prayer always works. The virus does not have to drive us apart; in fact it can truly bring us closer together not physically but spiritually.**

**I called Kevin Mertz at the paper to cancel the story about the upcoming Presbytery meeting which has been canceled. He shared that most churches are canceling Sunday worship for the near future. Many will be live streaming the sermons however. This is a great idea and we are working on it. I will let you know later how to access it.**

**Stay Well,**

**Pastor Paul**

**P.S. Our secretary/treasurer continues conducting the business of the church during normal business hours. Please call if you need anything.**

**If you bought 30 rolls of  
toilet paper, you owe 3  
to the church.  
Tithing is not cancelled.**



## **Pandemic Diary**

### **Installment One**

**March 16, 2020**

**Dear Church Friends,**

**To help me keep my sanity in these troubled times I have decided to do an online diary about the experience. I don't have to write sermons or teach classes so I want to do something to channel my writing impulses.**

**Today I realized several things. The first is that Laura and I eat out, ALOT. That will change. The freezer really has lots of food in it so we will not starve but we will have to cook.**

**I was also curious about the grocery store. Would the shelves be bare as they seemed on TV. I went to Weis and found that not much had changed. Some shelves were bare like water and paper products but most of the store was full and not too crowded.**

**I was reminded by Sherry, in her church treasurer role, that the bills keep coming in but without church, the tithes and offerings do not. Please continue your generous giving even if you don't get to put it in the offering plate. Your tithe can be mailed to the church office at 401 Main Street or it can be dropped off during office hours. We only ask that you don't come to the office if you have any symptoms.**

**I am making a list of places that have take out and have good food. If you know of any please let me know and I will include them in my letters. None of us have ever experienced anything like this virus before but we know God will help us through it. Rick Wolf said it is like the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for forty years. I pray it won't last that long! It is important to keep our sense of humor.**

**Stay Safe and Healthy,**

**Pastor Paul**