

1 Corinthians 12:4-7; 12-14; 26-27
Germs and Jesus
WRCOB 5.3.20

I read in the Richmond Times Dispatch this past week
That 60% of recently surveyed adults identified
As anxious and stressed.

I am surprised it's that low!

Everyone I know is experiencing some anxiety
In this stay-at-home, lock-down, shut down, unemployed
Quarantined, isolated, masked and gloved era
We currently live in.

The hog processing plant in my old hometown
Of Waterloo IA, has closed down
Due to high levels of Covid 19 infections.

This plant processes close to 20,000 hogs per day.

With other processing plants closing
Not only in hog but poultry and potentially beef
The supply chain that feeds the nation is broken.

The result is two-fold.

Farmers can't get their products to the consumers
And consumers do without or pay higher prices.

Farmers face the distinct possibility
Of euthanizing thousands of hogs and chickens.

Dairy farmers are dumping their milk

Vegetable and fruit growers are leaving their crops to rot.

Consequently, the consumer, you and me
Lose by the empty shelves
In the meat and fresh produce section.

My heart goes out to the farmers who feed the nation.

It is hard for me to fathom working 12 hour days
7 days per week, 365 a year
And forced to destroy your source of income.

Anxiety? How bout it?

Or how about the Emergency Room doctor from NY
Who committed suicide this past week.

We can only imagine what went on inside her
With the overwhelming rush of Covid 19 patients
After weathering the sickness herself.

It must have consumed her.

Those who are without work
Those who are forced to work
Those who work only to euthanize their product

Are experiencing the same thing. Anxiety.

Is there anyone you know who isn't a tad anxious?

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But if there is any consolation despite our anxiety
We are not alone
We are in this together.

And the hope I find to fight my own anxiety
Is found in the community of faith
Christians call the body of Christ.

It gives me comfort to be spiritually connected
To our Lord Jesus
And to my brothers and sisters around the world.

It not only gives me a sense of belonging
But it provides a channel for the skills I bring
To complement the skills you bring
To make the world a better place.

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In an editorial in this month's Christianity Today
Timothy Dalrymple uses a quote from Tolkien's book
The Lord of the Rings.

Frodo, the hobbit, grieves
Over the evil threatening the Shire
And the darkness spreading over Middle Earth.

He says to the wise sage, Gandalf
"I wish it need not have happened in my time."

And Gandalf wisely and compassionately replies: *"So do I,
and so do all who live to see such times.*

*But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is
what to do with the time that is given us."*

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We live in anxious times.

But God has specifically designed and created us
To live in community
Where each belongs and contributes
To the common good.

We're in this together.

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In our Scripture Lesson, we listen in on the Apostle Paul
Writing his letter to the church in Corinth.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that what binds them together
Is their commonality found in Jesus Christ.

One baptism and one Spirit.

And within that body there is a variety of skills
And a variety of tasks
But the same God who works in all persons
To the benefit of the greater good.

The Spirit is the glue that kept them bound together.

Strife, dissent and division
Strived to fracture their community
And anxiety was the dominant emotion.

Paul reminds them that one Spirit binds them together.

That each of them are integral to the whole
Each having skills and gifts needed
To enable and empower the whole community.

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Paul's words to the Corinthians speaks to me today.

As Christians and members of the human race
We are in this together bound by a common spirit.

And each of us bear skills and tasks
Even within the social distanced, quarantined
Isolated, and home-bound lives we live.

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I have witnessed this these past six weeks.

I have seen the body of Christ
Through Face Book, email, texting, and phone calls
Rally around one of our dear brothers
As he fought for his life with Covid 19.

In that common concern for a suffering brother
I have experienced the unity of Spirit.

I have read and heard the sincere and earnest prayers
From a physically disconnected body
Coming together as one body in Spirit.

As Paul writes to his beloved brothers and sisters in Corinth
If one member suffers, all suffer together with it.

What is unique to many of us is that
This network, both the Spirit's and the internet's
Was immediate and widely encompassing.

People from Virginia, Iowa, and Nigeria
Folks from all over the world
Connected online through the union of prayer.

Awesome!

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I have noticed this connectedness in another way.

People within congregations have reached out
To the broader Christian community.

When we physically met on Sundays
We spent our time at church
Worshiping and fellowshiping as a closed body.

Now, on Sunday mornings, I see
People spending more time
Browsing others' worship services.

Engaged in other ministries

I have heard from folks who watched services
From two to three churches in a morning.

The unity of the body has broadened to include
A broader spectrum within the faith.

And vice versa.

There are people from other congregations
Joining us in our time of worship
That wouldn't have otherwise.

Can you imagine what life would be like today
In our stay-at-home, keep your distance lives
If we didn't have the internet?

We are moving into a whole new realm of possibilities.

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Despite what we are facing today in this pandemic
The loss of lives
Loss of jobs
Disruption in our supply chain

The feelings of isolation and depression
Caused by the absence of people in our lives
The forced dismembering of the body

I want to say as the Apostle Paul said

2 Corinthians 4:9 (CEV) In times of trouble, God is with us, and when we are knocked down, we get up again.

I've read, some believe this is the Devil's work
External forces driving us apart
Fracturing families and communities.

I don't know whether the Devil's involved or not.

But I see something else also happening.

I see a coming together despite the separateness.

A uniting of people transcending culture, race or place.

Through the internet

We have the opportunity to combine our voices

Our skills, our resources

And in unity be a force to reckon with.

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Esther, the Old Testament queen

Who with hesitancy took the lead in saving her people

Was challenged by the words of Mordecai.

Esther 4:14 NRSV Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.

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How about the chaplain at the Lakewood Retirement Village

An ordained minister, she is currently training as a CNA

A Certified Nursing Assistant.

From the Richmond Times Dispatch article

Chaplain Julie Gaines Walton has found a new way to minister to people in nursing home care during a deadly war with the corona virus.

She saw the need before her

And adjusted her ministry to fit the need.

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As the body of Christ

How will we rise to the challenges before us?

Are we here, for such a time as this?

All we have to decide

Is what to do with the time that is given us.

The body of Christ, the church
Is making strides toward
Engaging the new reality

To continue to minister even in our stay at home lives
To carry the message of love to a broken world
In whatever medium is at our disposal.

In a strange way, I feel our congregation
And maybe Christianity at large
Has drawn closer
Because or despite our current situation.

Let us use the tools before us
Our God-given skills
And the power of the community of faith

To bring hope to despair
Faith to fear
And a unified presence in a fractured world.

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Daniel Harrel, editor of Christianity Today
Reminded me of a little nursery rhyme
I had heard before and apropos for today.

*Wash your hands and say your prayers
Germs and Jesus are everywhere!*

Anxious?

Keep your distance, stay at home and wear your mask

And trust that your prayers are heard
And that Jesus is just one step ahead of you
Now and forevermore. Amen.