



Carstairs-Bancroft United Church

February 26, 2021

**DAILY ENCOURAGEMENT
DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC
By Rev. Maria Szabo Berces**



Source: Our Daily Bread

Beloved Carstairs Bancroft United Church Members,

Before the pandemic we celebrated Holy Communion every month in our sanctuary. We could see the bread broken and the cup lifted up with our eyes in the same sacred place we gathered. They reminded us of the great love of God for us. These visible elements also gave us the confirmation of our value in the eyes of the Holy One: **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”** (John 3:16-17)

We tried online Communion, but due to the limitations of online space, we do it less frequently. I long for the time when we will be able to gather again in person to break the bread and lift up the cup. To hear the words of the liturgy: *“You made us for relationship with you and with each other.”*

However, I believe this statement is true even during the physical distancing regulations. We can connect with the Almighty in our homes and private spaces through prayer and Scripture reading. We are taught that God is not limited either by our physical reality or by the chronological time, which we measure by clocks and calendars. Our Heavenly Father is able and willing to be with us even though we **“walk through the darkest valley”** (Psalm 23:4) As Moses formulated it: **“Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.”** (Psalm 90:2)

This **“everlasting to everlasting”** God is ready to stand by us, and also calls us to stand by one another as we journey through these difficult times.

And as we are still able to spend quiet, private time with the Holy One in our homes and gather for online meetings or worship on ZOOM, we also have tools to maintain the relationships in our church family. These weekday encouragements are one of them, but I also make efforts to phone, especially to those of you who can't connect with us online. I am also available for pre-arranged private meetings if you would like talk in person, while honoring the precautions set by health authorities.

And these gears – emails, phone calls - are available for all of us! I encourage you to pick up the phone, and contact your friends and church family members with whom you haven't talked for a longer time. Find out how they are doing, and assure them that you are thinking of them. This way we can find out if someone needs help, or kind words of comfort. This way we *all* can be tools of God's love. As Apostle Paul put it: **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”** (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

Grace and Peace to You All,

Rev. Maria



Never Alone

Two are better than one . . . If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. (Ecclesiastes 4:9–10)

READ ECCLESIASTES 4:8–12

“It can be an affliction more harrowing than homelessness, hunger or disease,” wrote Maggie Fergusson in *The Economist’s* 1843 magazine. Her subject? Loneliness. Fergusson chronicled the increasing rates of loneliness, irrespective of one’s social or economic status, using heart-wrenching examples of what it feels like to be lonely.

The hurt of feeling alone isn’t new to our day. Indeed, the pain of isolation echoes off the pages of the ancient book of Ecclesiastes. Often attributed to King Solomon, the book captures the sorrow of those who seem to lack any meaningful relationships (4:7–8). The speaker lamented that it’s possible to acquire significant wealth and yet experience no value from it because there’s no one to share it with.

But the speaker also recognized the beauty of companionship, writing that friends help you accomplish more than you could achieve on your own (v. 9); companions help in times of need (v. 10); partners bring comfort (v. 11); and friends can provide protection in difficult situations (v. 12).

Loneliness is a significant struggle—God created us to offer and receive the benefits of friendship and community. If you’re feeling alone, pray that God would help you form meaningful connections with others. In the meantime, find encouragement in the reality that the believer is never truly alone because Jesus’ Spirit is always with us (Matthew 28:20). – By **Lisa M. Samra**

REFLECT & PRAY

Heavenly Father, when I feel lonely, give me courage to reach out to others with an offer of friendship. Amen.

How might you reach out to someone who’s lonely? How have you experienced the blessing of God’s Spirit with you when you’ve felt alone?

SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

The book of Ecclesiastes is unique for its grappling with “existential angst,” or the meaninglessness of life. Our days are complicated and our experiences aren’t always easily understood. Ecclesiastes reflects the confusion we all experience as we wrestle with the challenges of life; therefore, it has an almost timeless appeal. It speaks to highly personal issues, such as loneliness (4:8), that are just as relevant today as when it was first composed. But even a subject as apparently simple as loneliness is not as straightforward as it appears. A few verses earlier in verse 4 the writer complained that one’s labor is a result of the jealousy of one for another, and yet in verse 8 the problem is not having anyone around. We don’t want to be alone, and yet certain relationships can bring pain and discomfort—perhaps leaving us wanting to be left alone! Ecclesiastes gives voice to the painful tensions we experience in life. – By **Con Campbell**

Learn more about the [book of Ecclesiastes](#).

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