



Carstairs-Bancroft United Church

March 12, 2021

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



Source: Rev. Maria

Beloved Carstairs Bancroft United Church Members,

Yesterday we marked the one-year anniversary of Covid-19 officially becoming a global pandemic. As we passed this milestone, we can see light at the end of the tunnel with vaccination rolling out. But I can also hear the questions more and more: what life – and church – will look like after we get back to ‘normal’? How can we define ‘normal’ anyway in the aftermath of this virus?

Many experts of human behaviour agree that it wouldn’t be the same as it was before the March of 2020. While we will be able to get back to some of our familiar and greatly missed activities, life won’t be identical to the times BC (Before Covid). Should we be surprised? Haven’t we heard before that the only permanent thing in life and human history is change?

If we look back to the records of millennia passed by, we can see how true it is. Rulers and Empires that had great influence on the majority of this globe faded away, and new ones arose. If we look at the Bible, we can remember the report on the conversation that the disciples had with Jesus at a visit of the Jerusalem temple: **“As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!” “Do you see all these great buildings?” replied Jesus. “Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”** (Mark 13:1-2) It was unimaginable at the time of this dialogue, but did happen in 70 A.D., when the Romans demolished the whole city.

However, during the instabilities of human history and the uncertainties due to these changes, we can count on one stable point. The Scriptures – which were written that we may believe and have life – tell us that we can rely on the love, grace, and providence of the One **“who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”** (Revelation 1:8)

A well-known Voices United hymn articulates this assurance very clearly: *“Great is thy faithfulness, God our Creator; there is no shadow of turning with thee; thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not; as thou hast been thou forever wilt be.”* (VU # 288)

It is a great encouragement that the Almighty, who is not influenced by time or changes, cares for us. That though we **“are like a breath; [our] days are like a fleeting shadow.”** (Psalm 144:4); can consider the Source of Life *“our God”*. We are invited to say along with King David: **“He is my loving God and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield, in whom I take refuge...”** (Psalm 144:2)

During these disturbing times of unpredictability, when we have to prepare ourselves for an altered reality, we may believe in the strengthening, guiding and protecting presence of the Holy One. Through this faith we may gain a new viewpoint on life, and even on death, with the assurance that **“[nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** (Romans 8:39)

Grace and Peace to You All,

Rev. Maria



The Reason for Writing

But these are written that you may believe.
John 20:31

READ JOHN 20:24–31

“The Lord is my high tower We left the camp singing.” On September 7, 1943, Etty Hillesum wrote those words on a postcard and threw it from a train. Those were the final recorded words we would hear from her. On November 30, 1943, she was murdered at Auschwitz. Later, Hillesum’s diaries of her experiences in a concentration camp were translated and published. They chronicled her perspectives on the horrors of Nazi occupation along with the beauty of God’s world. Her diaries have been translated into sixty-seven languages—a gift to all who would read and believe the good as well as the bad.

The apostle John didn’t sidestep the harsh realities of Jesus’ life on earth; he wrote of both the good Jesus did and the challenges He faced. The final words from his gospel give insight into the purpose behind the book that bears his name. Jesus performed “many other signs . . . which are not recorded” (20:30) by John. But these, he says, were “written that you may believe” (v. 31). John’s “diary” ends on the note of triumph: “Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.” The gift of those gospel words allows us the opportunity to believe and “have life in his name.”

The Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) are diary accounts of God’s love for us. They’re words to read and believe and share, for they lead us to life. They lead us to Christ. – By **John Blase**

REFLECT & PRAY

Gracious God, thank You for the gift of the Scriptures, written down by faithful hands so that I might believe and have life. Amen.

How might it change the way you read the Gospels if you thought of them as diaries? How are you being led to the heart of Christ through them?

SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

Thomas is mentioned among Jesus’ disciples in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but it’s John’s gospel that gives us a close-up view of him. John’s account of Jesus includes six scenes where Thomas appears (all in chapters 11-20), and he first speaks in 11:16 after the death of Lazarus. Jesus’ well-known words in John 14:6—“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”—were in response to Thomas’ query, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” (v. 5).

In John, we see Thomas as a pessimist and realist—inquisitive, human, honest. And he’s commonly referred to as “doubting Thomas” because of his words in John 20:25 and Jesus’ response to him in verse 27. But his last recorded words reveal that he was convinced of who Jesus is: “My Lord and my God!” (v. 28). – By **Arthur Jackson**

Used with permission