

Hope Beyond Pandemic

Tuesday, February 2

1:00 - 2:00 pm EST

Leader: Bruce Epperly

Our lives have been disrupted by a pandemic, but at some point we will find a new normal. What will we do then? Better, what should we do then?

Based on his book, Hope Beyond Pandemic, Bruce Epperly considers our pandemic experiences and what they should challenge us to do. How can we live better in the world? Fearlessly but gently he takes on issues of injustice, intolerance, inequality in society and discusses how the interdependence we have found during this time needs to be lived out in our society as a whole. His solutions are spiritual, social, and yes, political

THE WEBINAR

1, FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE – Today we will talk primarily about hope beyond pandemic, hope that gives us patience, courage, and strength, hope that promotes transformation, growth, healing, and social justice within this time of pandemic, protest, and polarization. But our ability to live hopefully is connected to our faith and our love for others, including those we may never meet.

HOPE IS THE THING WITH FEATHERS THAT PERCHES IN THE SOUL AND SINGS THE TUNE WITHOUT THE WORDS AND NEVER STOPS AT ALL. – EMILY DICKINSON

- a. A number of years ago, a friend affixed his car's bumper sticker, "Got Hope?" – while she was referring to a presidential candidate's vision, this is still one of life's most important questions, we can ask ourselves as individuals and communities, as a nation – "Got hope?"
- b. **The Question is** - Have you hope within and beyond pandemic? How do we maintain hope in a time of and beyond pandemic?
- c. In a similar fashion, one of my favorite coffee cups repeats words from the prophet Jeremiah, words coming from God to the prophet and to us, **"I have plans for you. For good and not for evil, for a future and a hope."** – in a time of trial Jeremiah heard God's call and it shaped the contours of his faith, a faith with a future, and his relationship to

others, trusting that God’s love for him would give him resources to love others....

- d.** These simple messages point to the need for hope in times of challenge and crisis, when the future is dark and we see no way forward – these simple words remind us the winter of 2021 that God’s future is open for us, **and that when we walk with God, God makes a way where we perceived no way forward...**

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2. WE are in a time of challenge – we have lived through a “perfect storm” of pandemic, protest, and insurrection, of trauma brought on by chaotic leadership, daily tweets, and presidential bullying – a virus has brought our nation to its knees, young African Americans have been killed by law officers, hate and incivility proliferate, and the Capitol is overrun by a riotous mob, hellbent on destroying our democracy...

- As I reflect on the future of our planet, nation, communities, and congregations, I feel much like **Dante, who begins Canto One of *The Divine Comedy* with the confession, “In the middle of the journey of our life I came to myself within a dark wood where the straight way was lost.”**
- Do any of you feel like the straight way has been lost and you are trying to recover your bearings, reorient and recalibrate your spiritual GPS? (FEEL FREE TO RESPOND)
- We need hope to have a vision for the future and we need spiritual resources to face facts and then look toward the horizons of divine possibility

3. A Spiritual Practice

- *Let us begin by finding the quiet center: pausing to take a few deep breaths to center our spirits. In the Celtic tradition, there is a practice called the “caim” or “encircling.” Standing, sitting, or lying down, either visualize or draw a circle around yourself, going in a clockwise direction, as you say a prayer for protection or guidance Just a few deep breaths expand our spirits from reptilian to global, from fear to kindness and hope. As you circle yourself, knowing that you are always in the circle of God’s*

love....Experience yourself either by movement or imagination in the circle of God's love...

- *A deep breath...letting healing breath fill you...letting go of anxiety...opening to God's holy spirit...*
- *Listen to these words*
- *God is our refuge and strength,
a very present^[a] help in trouble.*

*Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.*

*There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.*

*God is in the midst of the city;^[b] it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.*

*The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.*

*The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.*

Come, behold the works of the LORD;

*He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.*

***“Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth.”***

***The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.^[d]***

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LISTEN AGAIN

WHAT DO THESE WORDS MEAN TO YOU? (FEEL FREE TO RESPOND)

WHAT GIVES YOU HOPE IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC? FEEL FREE TO RESPOND

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4) During the time of pandemic, a light bulb went on, I realized that **virtually all of scripture was written during national distress or describes times of national, tribal, or community stress –**

- Think of Adam and Eve starting over after having been exiled from the Garden
- The Hebrew people in Egyptian bondage and then struggling to become a nation in their forty year wilderness trek
- Enemies threatening the existence of the Northern and Southern Realms
- Civil war in the land and Roman occupation
- Prophetic protests of economic injustice
- The Cross of Jesus
- Persecution of the early church and the arrest and martyrdom of the first Christian leaders

- **THE BIBLE IS A CONFLICT-RIDDEN BOOK AND YET IT IS HOPEFUL FROM THE FIRST TO LAST PAGE**
- **YOU CAN SEE THIS IN THE WORDS OF PSALM 46 – THERE IS TROUBLE AFOOT, THINGS ARE SHAKEN UP AND YET WE CAN RECOGNIZE GOD IN THE UPHEAVAL AND GOD WILL GET US THROUGH**

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5) Faith, hope, and love – the three great spiritual virtues -We will focus on hope but these can never be separated....

Those who have hope are nurtured by the unseen, the not yet in the affirmation of a deeper reality that meets the eye....

Hope casts a light across the widening universe, aiming us toward far horizons, and love must guide our way, if hope is to be extended to embrace all of us...

- **As Martin Luther King counsels, *WE MUST ACCEPT FINITE DISAPPOINTMENT, BUT NEVER LOSE INFINITE HOPE.***

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- 6) It has been a long journey since we first heard the name COVID on January 20, 2020, at a nursing home in Washington state...we might not even have noticed at the time, if we don't read world news, the likely origins in China, even national leaders acted as if it was big nothing, no reason to upset folks....
- Remember church, right before Easter....Just shutting down for a few weeks....
 - While our church returned to in-person worship in October for five weeks....with medical counsel...WE moved back to zoom as soon as numbers began to go upward
 - Now, a year later, it looks like we will be doing our Holy Week services on zoom and not in person, and possibly outdoor worship on the beach for Easter morning, provided that vaccines are readily available and the community is not engulfed by variant strains of COVID
 - Physicians tell us that under the best of circumstances, there won't be a new normal until 2022 - a we are concerned even then about mutations
 - Whenever we do return, we will continue to embody healthy practices - The new normal is masks, safe distancing, small groups, streaming and zoom worship and meetings...some people may never want to go back to in-person worship, study, or meetings...

NOT ALL CHANGE IS BAD, SOMETIMES DISCOMFORT AND CHALLENGE, REVELATION IS GOOD FOR US...ETHICALLY AND SPIRITUALLY

- **During this COVID time, not all change has been bad - We have become a global congregation with persons attending from throughout the country, yet we may not regularly see each other in person till summer at the earliest**
- **WHERE HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED SOMETHING POSITIVE DURING THE PANDEMIC – FEEL FREE TO RESPOND**

- 7) We are living daily with the unprecedented and what we once thought impossible. We have lived through hope and hopelessness...we have faced what we can't imagine in a nation that thrives on control, power, and a can-do attitude - pandemic, protest of structural racism, and then the storming of our Capitol by white nationalists and Christian extremists...This is surely the experience of much of scripture

8) It is ironic that the storming of the Capitol by domestic terrorists took place on the Feast of the Epiphany – the illumination of God in the world, the revealing of Jesus to foreigners, magi from Persia/Iran

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9) **The pandemic has been revelatory – it has illuminated what we have denied in our personal and political lives, in our theologies and our ethics.**

10) **Think a moment – what has the pandemic confronted us with that we might previously have pushed in the background – living lives of safety and comfort**

WHAT ETHICAL OR POLITICAL INSIGHTS HAVE YOU RECEIVED IN THE PANDEMIC? (FEEL FREE TO RESPOND)

We have been confronted with...

- **Environmental injustice**, higher COVID death rates in poor urban communities due to air quality
- **Racial injustice**, minority businesses and communities have been hit hardest
- **Economic injustice** – the separation of essential, go to work employees, working minimum wage, food insecurity, and those who can work at home
- The reality that even in national crisis, we don't have or can't conjure up national unity – **ideology trumps care for the neighbor, science, or wellbeing of the nation...**
- **Growing disparity of rich and poor**

11) On theological and ethical level, we have witnessed...

- The moral bankruptcy and destructive impact of rugged individualism – different boats in the storm; refusal to wear masks
- The moral bankruptcy and destructive impact of nation first ideologies – refusal to cooperate with other nations in responding to COVID
- Science and climate denial
- Denial of any common facts

- The lure of falsehood and denial, and its destructive impact on persons' lives and the body politic
- The danger of backward looking and binary faith perspectives, separating the world into us and them...in and out...saved and unsaved...people like us and people who differ, and deserve no consideration as we take back our faith and our country

12) The pandemic has confronted us with the necessity of change – the normal must be different than the past.

- **We are a diseased nation, and we need healing – of the spirit, relationships economics, and communities.**
- We know the treatment will be difficult and painful and the outcome uncertain. In such desperate yet hopeful moments, we plead with **Leo Tolstoy's Ivan Ilych, "I want to live!" Echoing back to us, as it did to Ilych, comes a question, "Do I want to live as I did before?"**
- We know that in important ways we will never be the same after recovery. We know that we shouldn't be the same after recovery – we cannot go back to rugged individualism, polarized politics, racism, and economic and environmental injustice.
- **Hope is grounded in a vision of change...that we can change! We also know that threats we face present us with possibilities for change. What new realities will we embrace? Will we hide away in fear, clinging to the way things were? Or will we go forth with hope, guided by inner wisdom of apocalypse, the divine revealings that lure us toward new horizons?**

QUESTIONS

DO YOU SEE ANY OPPORTUNITIES IN THIS TIME OF PANDEMIC AND BEYOND? WHAT MIGHT THEY BE?

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13) We need hope and hope is experiential, psychological, theological, and spiritual...what we hope for shapes our commitments, values, attitudes toward fact and science, our understanding of possibility, our vision of our destiny as persons, congregations, and nations...

- 14) Hopelessness is always a threat – will our nation survive the incivil war? Will our congregation survive without in-person worship? What will our nation and congregation, our communities, look like in the future....?
- 15) Like our parents in faith, we see ourselves in the words of young poet laureate Amanda Gorman –

We did not feel prepared to be the heirs

Of such a terrifying hour.

But within it we've found the power

To author a new chapter,

To offer hope and laughter to ourselves.

In the darkest night the eye begins to see, a horizon – a far horizon – the horizon of faith emerges and a new day beckons...

Again we can with Amanda Gorman –

When day comes, we step out of the shade aflame and unafraid.

A new dawn looms as we free it,

For there is always light, if only we are brave enough to see it,

If only we are brave enough to be it.

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- 16) MOVEMENTS OF HOPE, IMAGES OF HOPE - For images of hope, we need healthy theology, spiritual practice, ethics, and politics

17) **Theologies of Hope**

- **It is more important to ask, “What kind of God you believe in?” than “Do you believe in God?”**
- **Theology is our vision of the world and ourselves, how we understand our place in the universe, questions of freedom and possibility**
- Hope trusts eternity in the maelstrom of time...in a dynamic and open-ended world, we can trust the Faithfulness of God – God’s mercies are new every morning, Great is God’s faithfulness
- The story is told of the night of the shooting stars. As they saw the falling stars, the villagers ran for their lives. “The sky is falling. We are doomed,” they cried. As they ran aimlessly through the village, they came upon the wise women and men of the village. “The stars are falling,” they shouted. The wise ones paused and looked at the heavens, and responded, “Yes the stars are falling. But look see all the stars that are standing still.”

18) What kind of God do you follow - Imagining God? **WHEN YOU THINK OF GOD IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC WHAT IMAGES COME TO YOU?** (Feel free to share)

- **CAN IMAGES OF GOD PROMOTE HOPELESSNESS IN TIME OF PANDEMIC AND CRISIS? A HOPELESS GOD? WHAT IMAGES OF GOD CREATE HOPELESSNESS....**
- **The God of hopelessness**
Created the pandemic.
Punishes our nation with the pandemic.
Chooses who lives and who dies.
Has planned the present and future in its entirety.
- **Emerging hope**
- **Hope requires an open future, the ability to make decisions and determine our destiny by these decisions, that our actions matter in the long haul.**
- **Hope requires that what we do matters to God as well as our neighbor.**

- Hope requires that the future is open and that what we do can change the contours of the future – the Christmas Story and It’s a Wonderful Life

- **The God of hope**

The source of possibility

Leaves room for freedom and creativity

Shares power with the world

Works with us to bring about the best possibility

Has unfinished business with the world

Needs us as companions in healing the world

God is the origin of the moral arc of history and needs us to be part of the process

We are the hands and feet of God (Teresa of Avila)

A relational, creative, companioning God who calls us to be companions in healing the world.

19) Although God does not cause pandemic, drought, and natural disaster, we are also weighed in the balance and facing as a society recompense for our injustice, ignorance, and apathy. Our economic and public health houses built on shifting sands have collapsed from the impact of a microscopic virus.

20) Hope is in God’s companionship, in an open future in which God needs us – God is the fellow sufferer who understands and the joyful companion who celebrates

QUESTIONS

21) Spiritualities of Hope

- **Spirituality is our quest to experience the holy**
- **God was in this place and now I know it – this place is wherever you are – a ladder to heaven with angels all around in every nook and cranny...**
- **Spirituality may emerge unexpectedly...it also involves practices that open our senses to see and be light to our world...you are the light of the world, a city of a hill cannot be hidden, but gives light to all around.**

- Spiritual experiences give us a sense of transcendence, a larger perspective from which to respond to the evils of our time.
- **Practices of Hope**
- Horizons of hospitals – patients recover faster if they have a vista rather than confined view
- **What practices open up the world to hope? FEEL FREE TO SHARE**
- **Practices that focus on the imagination – visualizing a healed world**
- **Practices that join us with God – listening to our lives in prayer and meditation**
- **Practices that awaken us to the possible**
- **There is no conflict between contemplation and action, spirituality and social involvement...**
- **Practices that get us out into the street – contemplative activism – I felt like my legs were praying**
- **Fannie Lou Hamer - you can pray all you want, but you need to get up off your couch and act!**

QUESTIONS?

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- 22) **Ethics of hope – our vision of hope shapes and is shaped by our vision of our agency and ability to change the world, our small world at the very least...**
- The ethics of the moral and spiritual arc
 - Prayer leads to action
 - **The ethics of hope is grounded in our recognition that we can do something beautiful for God**
 - **Each moment is a moment for transformation – when we save a soul, we save the world...**
 - **Do something beautiful for God**
 - Recognition that we can change the world by simple acts of commitment – wearing a mask, practicing safe distancing, safe behavior...

- ***THE BEST WAY TO NOT FEEL HOPELESS IS TO GET UP AND DO SOMETHING. DON'T WAIT FOR GOOD THINGS TO HAPPEN TO YOU. IF YOU GO OUT AND MAKE SOME GOOD THINGS HAPPEN, YOU WILL FILL THE WORLD WITH HOPE, YOU WILL FILL YOURSELF WITH HOPE. – BARACK OBAMA***
- **Hope opens the future – it opens us to be larger persons, whose focus goes from self-interest, to favoring like ourselves, to community focus and national focus, and then to world loyalty, we are all in the same storm together...we need to be in the same boat together....**

Questions

What ethical possibilities has the pandemic raised for you?

23) **Politics of hope/ prophetic healing**

- **We are by definition political beings – the personal is the political and the political is personal...**
- **WHAT GIVES YOU POLITICAL HOPE?**
- **A new kind of politics, prophetic and also healing; calling out injustice, working for change, yet transcending hate, incivility, polarization – seeing something of God in the other**
- **Joining challenge with reconciliation**
- **We are all in the same storm, not all in the same boat – we need to see ourselves in the same boat**
- **Prophetic healing seeks a pathway of social and political wholeness that binds together diverse communities, rich and poor, male and female, citizen and immigrant, left and right, and atheist and believer.**

In describing his own prophetic mysticism, one of my mentors, African American theologian and pastor Howard Thurman, asserts **that the mystic, inspired by the encounter with God, “seek[s] to remove anything that prevents the individual from free and easy access to his own altar-stair that is in his own heart.”**

Prophetic healing seeks a pathway of social and political wholeness that binds together diverse communities, rich and poor, male and female, citizen and immigrant, left and right, and atheist and believer.

A politics of hope is grounded in restless and imaginative visions, lively actions, and spiritual equanimity

- **Hope is grounded in the affirmation that we can make a difference...what we do matters beyond our lives....we are part of a larger reality, God's movements toward wholeness...**
- **We cannot fully discern the contours of God's vision, but we can trust, as Theodore Parker avers, the moral arc of the universe and its aim toward justice....The moral and spiritual arc inspire prophetic restlessness and challenge, they also inspire the quest for prophetic healing the embraces the planet in its entirety, reconciling enemies and promoting unity amid diversity.**
- That this is the time for transformation....We are the change we are looking for
We are the ones we are looking for
- **A Politics of inclusion, welcome, empathy, and compassion...a politics of hopeful transformation**
- Mindful politics – who is not being served; who is left out....politics is about a more perfect union
- Examining injustice in the pandemic
- Affirming non-essential workers

24) This leads us to embrace the prophetic vision articulated by Angela Davis in her play on the Serenity Prayer - I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept.

- **Let justice role down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream.**

Questions?

25) And so we go forth in hope, remembering the words of Reinhold Niebuhr –

“Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope.

Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith.

Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we must be saved by love.”

And so, we can hope with Irish poet Seamus Heaney

THE CURE OF TROY

Human beings suffer They torture one another,

They get hurt and get hard.

No poem or play or song

Can fully right a wrong Inflicted and endured.

The innocent in gaols

Beat on their bars together.

A hunger-striker’s father

Stands in the graveyard dumb.

The police widow in veils

Faints at the funeral home. History says,

Don't hope

On this side of the grave...

But then, once in a lifetime

The longed-for tidal wave

Of justice can rise up,

And hope and history rhyme.

So hope for a great sea-change

On the far side of revenge.

Believe that a further shore

Is reachable from here.

Believe in miracles

And cures and healing wells.

Call miracle self-healing:

The utter, self-revealing

Double-take of feeling.

If there's fire on the mountain

Or lightning and storm

And a god speaks from the sky

That means someone is hearing

The outcry and the birth-cry

Of new life at its term.

It means once in a lifetime

That justice can rise up

And hope and history rhyme.

APPENDIX

- 26) I believe that peace involves much more than individualistic witnesses to faith. Peace takes us beyond self-interest or spiritual superiority to solidarity with all creation. Peace is grounded in the interplay of God's providential care and challenge and our faithful and sacrificial responsiveness. God is at work in each moment of experience. As Whitehead observes, **God's "purpose is always embodied in particular ideals relevant to the actual state of the world... Every act leaves the world with a deeper or fainter impress of God. He then passes to his next relation to the world with enlarged, or diminished, presentation of ideal values."**⁸ Life is a call and response in which we neither passive victims nor apathetic observers but active companions and partners in God's realm of Shalom. What we do shapes the intensity of God's presence and power in the world. Peace comes for recognizing that we are part of a holy adventure, in which we are invited see our personal and national adventures as part of a larger planetary and cosmic adventure.
- 27) **Each moment evokes a decision — will we add to the beauty or ugliness of the world? Will be life-givers or death-dealers? The path of peace involves ever-widening spirals of compassion, moving us from self-interest to world loyalty.** Following the path of Jesus, we can choose to "lose" our lives, the life of self-concern and individualism and success obtained at the expense of the weak and marginalized, to "gain" our lives as part of God's holy adventure. In the words of Whitehead, **"Peace is self-control at its widest, — at the 'width' where the self has been lost and interest has been transferred to coordinations wider than personality."**⁹
- 28) There is the possibility of change on the horizon, and yet...we fear for the future...we weep at death tolls, we lament loss, we are angry and impatient and we need a reality larger than the moment to get us through
- 29) We are convicted by the words of Harry Emerson Fosdick, **"save us from weak resignation to the evils we deplore," as we realize our voices have been muted by our own complicity and comfort with injustice as related to our own economic wellbeing and social privilege. We are, as Thomas Merton confesses from the apparent purity of a Trappist monastery, guilty bystanders.**
- 30) The Hebraic prophets saved their greatest rebuke for religious leaders and complacent temple goers
- 31) Deep down, we know that after this crisis subsides, we may never get back to normal, at least the normal for which we had planned before March 2020. For those attuned to the signs of the times, the Coronavirus pandemic reveals other pandemics on the way, including one of our own making, global climate change. The pandemic also reveals the

reality that what we once described as normal excluded and marginalized many of our siblings from the “good life” and put the planetary wellbeing at risk.

32) Despite our desire to turn back the clock, there is only one way for those of us who seek to follow the way of Jesus — forward toward a “new heaven and a new earth.” We need to forge a new future, inspired by new visions of ourselves, our congregations, our national priorities, and our planet. We need healing and transformation of our hearts, minds, and relationships. We need to be prophets of a new era, acting on what has been revealed to us about ourselves and our nation.

33) We can live by fear, closing the circle of love to include only those in our immediate families and letting the rest of the world go to hell. We can live also by love. Love that is prudent, but also generous and compassionate. Love that is careful, keeping proper social distancing, but also compassionate and sacrificial. Love that enlarges the soul and inspires us to patience and empathy, when we are tempted to be angry, impatient, uncivil, and uncaring, not just toward strangers but to those whom we hold most dear. As followers of Jesus and citizens in a time of pandemic, we are challenged as Abraham Lincoln challenged the USA during the Civil War, to follow the better angels of our nature, and to place our fears in God’s hands, trusting God’s presence in the direst situations and reaching out to the vulnerable, overcoming self-interest and leaning toward world loyalty.

34) Hope takes us from the prison house of the present – it is also embedded in the tragic beauty of the now - **HOPE IS GROUNDED IN FACING FACTS, EMBRACING OUR EXPERIENCES**

35) **The dangers of denial, death! Fixation** on the past...

What has been the feeling tone of the pandemic for you and your congregation?

How have things changed?

36) WHAT GIVES YOU HOPE?

37) A TIME OF REVEALING...ILLUMINATING

The Coronavirus has revealed in stark details the realities of injustice in America. Economic and judicial disparity existed long before the pandemic and it is likely that the pandemic will exacerbate inequalities that deaden the spirit and jeopardize the health of millions of Americans. Indeed, the pandemic has been apocalyptic in its revelation of the fragility, inequity, and ecological devastation beneath our apparent economic prosperity. In my own state, hospitalization records indicate that there are higher rates of Coronavirus in communities with “dirty air,” each of which has a high percentage of minority, low-income residents, and accordingly high rates of asthma and other environmentally-related respiratory diseases.

During the time of pandemic, persons of color are at greater risk than the overall population as a result of health factors such as hypertension, diabetes, and obesity and accessibility to health care. These risks have been accentuated due to employment and housing that prevents telecommuting, sheltering in place, and the physical separation, all of which are available to professional workers living in suburban neighborhoods. African Americans, Latinos, and immigrants are at the front lines of nursing home care, farm work, food packing, grocery sales, and food distribution. Unlike salaried employees, they have few health benefits and often receive modest, if any, sick leave

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38) A TIME FOR CHANGE

Each moment is an opportunity for spiritual and moral transformation. Each moment brings divine revealings that call us forward toward new visions of ourselves and the world. The apostle Paul proclaims, "now is the day of salvation." (2 Corinthians 6:2) Deep down within even the most challenging moments of life, God is moving and calling us toward healing and wholeness as individuals and communities. The moral and spiritual arcs of history are not suspended during times of crisis and pandemic. In fact, I believe the arcs of healing and transformation accelerate as choices of life and death present themselves puncturing our illusions and sense of immunity from life's crises.

The values and practices that led to inadequate responses to the pandemic cannot save us in a time of pandemic. Nor will they provide respite from an even larger crisis to come, global climate change, for which there is no cure or vaccine except a transformation of values.

- 39) The nation's leadership and social structures were weighed in the balance and found bereft of vision and morality. It appears that the American way is suffering the same fate, having built its house on the sands of materialism, consumption, income inequality, individualism, environmental destruction, and nation first ideology.
- 40) Though it has been a long time coming, the weakness of our system and the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of our values, often masqueraded as religious values by the court preachers, has been unmasked. The American Empire is collapsing before our eyes, hastened by the pandemic, and the unwillingness of the nation's leaders to repent our nation's misplaced values and priorities. Our illusions have been revealed by the pandemic, and we are presented with the opportunity to seek healing or continue in the ways of death. We pray that out of the collapse of the American empire, the Empire of Good will be born.
- 41) Faithfulness requires repentance, and repentance requires us to see life as it is without dishonesty or disinformation. Honest recognition of our intentional and unintentional The recognition that health care, housing, and voting are rights that should not be based on income, employment, neighborhood, ethnicity, and political maneuvering.

- An efficient and humane way of providing reparations for First Americans and descendants of slaves, involving communities and reservations.
- Strengthening and expanding global agencies such as the World Health Organization and calling these organizations to their highest visions.
- A national tithe from the wealthiest nations, aimed at uplifting nations in the majority world.
- Reimagining a truly global United Nations, challenging its member nations to live by the organization's vision rather than national self-interest.
- Reimagine the world banking and monetary system to benefit the poor as well as wealthy nations.
- Environmental justice including those most at risk from toxic environments, the economically vulnerable and political powerless, persons of color, as well as future generations of humans and non-humans.

The moral and spiritual arcs of history aim toward justice

Parker, that they “do not pretend to understand the moral universe, the arc is a long one,” but they are certain that the arc of the universe “bends toward justice.” The moral and spiritual arc inspire prophetic restlessness and challenge, they also inspire the quest for prophetic healing the embraces the planet in its entirety, reconciling enemies and promoting unity amid diversity.

42) The greatest harm political prevarication and disinformation creates in times of crisis is lack of trust which leads to citizens' unwillingness to sacrifice for the wellbeing of one's neighbors and the nation's wellbeing. The greatest harm religious dishonesty can create, in the joining of congregational and political realms, is the assumption that our viewpoints reflect God's biases and that an attack on our values and way of life is an attack on God. The words of the prophets may be written on subway walls and, also, in medical counsel regarding testing, sheltering in place, and the trajectory of a pandemic. For those who humbly seek the truth, divine wisdom and apocalyptic is found in medical research labs as well as in sanctuaries and meditation halls.

43) The Hebraic prophets and their descendants Jesus and John the Baptist recognized that healing of the spirit, like healing of the body, begins with an accurate assessment of our personal and political wellbeing. Without facts, authentic transformation is impossible. Trading in falsehood, magical thinking, and dishonesty, whether in our professional and personal lives, or from a pulpit or press conference from the White House, disempowers those around us, destroys trust, and deadens the spirit. Faithfulness requires facts. Today's prophets demand accuracy in relationship to economic equality, climate change, and progress of the Coronavirus. The biblical tradition claims that all-loving and all-knowing God has a bias and so do God's prophets, and the articulation of God's vision is grounded in a clear sense of "what's going on," to quote soul singer Marvin Gaye. As one of my Georgetown University colleagues, physician Edmund Pellegrino asserted, ethics — whether medical or prophetic — requires three questions:

- What is the situation?
- What can I do?
- What ought I to do?

These three questions apply equally to congregational life and political decision-making.

Prophetic factuality, like an accurate medical diagnosis, provides the foundation for the healing we need spiritually, economically, relationally, and politically. Recognizing where we are — just as we are "without one plea" — opens the door to God's call, "now is the day of transformation

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44) Thanksgiving is the virtue of interconnectedness. When we are thankful, we remember that there is no such thing as a self-made person. Our successes are the result of the sacrifices and contributions of others — parents and grandparents, schoolteachers, pastors, Christian educators, farmers and industrial workers, military personnel, and so many others

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45) Gratitude without works is gratuitous! Thanksgiving inspires us to political and social action. Prayerfully contact your state and local representatives urging them to support fair wages and health care insurance for essential workers, cessation of deportation

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Corinthians 12:26-27)

46) Throughout this time of pandemic, we are told over and over that “we are all in this together.” These words are intended to remind us that we are responsible for the wellbeing of our communities, that what we do shapes the health of vulnerable people, and that despite physical distancing we are spiritually, emotionally, and relationally connected. We have discovered that, in the intricate interdependence of life, wearing a mask in public and sheltering in place are acts of love, caring for our neighbor as we would care for ourselves!

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47) The interdependence of life reminds us that there is no such thing as an isolated individual, community, state, or nation. The Coronavirus alerts us to the spiritual, moral, and political bankruptcy of nation-first, we can do it alone, ideologies. In fact, many now believe that the idolatry of national sovereignty, evident in the behavior of China as well as the USA nation-first foreign and economic policies, has been a factor in the spread of the pandemic. Nation-first ideologies and political policies turn us inward, promoting national isolation, cutting off supplies of medical goods and scientific information. They inspire us to think that the problems of other nations can't touch us and thus leave us unprepared when pandemic strikes.

The affirmation “we are all in this together” challenges us to transcend national selfishness in favor of ensuring the wellbeing of humankind as part of our planetary loyalty. The pandemic has shown us that borders are permeable and walls cannot defend us against viruses. We must prize local governments and cultures and encourage people to act, eat, and shop locally. But without a global spirit, emphasis on our own kin ultimately puts at risk those whom we most love.

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Not knowing the future or the right course for our congregations, let us focus on a simple prayer — to constantly ask for God’s guidance. Let us pray, “Grant us wisdom for path ahead. Show us the way and give us courage to be faithful. Help us find God’s path of salvation for our time and place.” Then let us listen for God’s voice in our personal and corporate life as we explore new ways of being church with hope beyond pandemic. With Harry Emerson Fosdick, let us ask God to: Grant us wisdom

Grant us courage

For the living of these days.