

Dear Beloved in Christ,

“Hope” is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I've heard it in the chilliest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.

- Emily Dickinson¹

How many times must we cry out, “This time it will be different,” only to find that we were wrong?

All during this tragic week, as I've wondered where hope is to be found, I've been thinking of Dickinson's poem. Maybe because, as I wrote in earlier letters, I watched over a family of little birds nesting in the long grass in my back yard this spring, fretting over their vulnerability. How fragile and at risk they seemed.

And how fragile and at risk is this “thing with feathers” perching in my soul . . . singing now a song of grief and dismay and protest. I'm acutely aware that this hopelessness and sadness in my white soul is as nothing compared to the relentless anguish and suffering in the souls of people of color.

So I think this thing with feathers *is* asking something of me – much more than a crumb. Its song is one of hope if I hear it requiring me to be part of that hope, to act on that hope, to demand that this time, *this time*, things must and will change. This song of hope asks of me, asks of every single one of us, a renewed determination to confront, repudiate, and *do something about* endemic racism, white nationalism, violent policing, the fulminations of the religious right, the strife and divisiveness in our government. How does this change if I don't change?

It is a song of hope if in it I hear God singing, God who does not abandon us in the storm, in the Gale, in our distress, in our Extremity – God who in Christ is our way, our truth, our life. God who has entrusted to us God’s own hope for a different kind of society, a new creation, a commonwealth called by Jesus the kingdom of God. There all are welcome, all are honored and respected, all stand in humility before the image of God in each other, all are healed, all share in the bounty of creation, all offer themselves and their service for the common good.

How does this change if we don’t change? We must join the song of hope for the coming of this kingdom, devoting ourselves in all humility to paying attention, listening, learning, speaking, acting, demonstrating, voting, praying, and being in it for the long haul. For “what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” [Micah 6:8]

As the baptized, we are marked as Christ’s own forever: we are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that [we] may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once [we] were not a people, but now [we] are God’s people; once [we] had not received mercy, but now [we] have received mercy.” [1 Peter 2:9-10] A gift and a noble calling. We need to own and act on both!

In this pandemic when, because of my age, I can’t yet do much out in the world, I plan to engage in reading and conversation that will challenge my assumptions about myself and about our nation, root out my own racism, uncover my own complacency and complicity, open me to greater honesty and deeper humility. This is part of deciding to sing hope. If this is to change, I must change. If this is to change, we all must change. When I’ve decided what to read, I’ll share my list with you.

I want to respond briefly to the movement of Pierce County into Phase 2 of the Governor’s re-opening plan, because you may be wondering what this might have to do with Christ Church.

1. For now, we remain in Phase 1. In other words we are continuing just as we have been. We need to monitor the result of all the re-openings, increased travel, and the massive gatherings for demonstrations. I’m glad for people who can now get back to their jobs, and for small business owners who can now open their stores, and very grateful for all those demonstrating peacefully for racial justice. (Even though large gatherings are not permitted in Phase 2 these do need to happen.) But I’m concerned that virus transmission may spike and think we need to be cautious.

2. Opening the church building will be first, for worship is our first priority. But this will be a complex process with many pastoral and practical questions to be answered and many preparations made. We’ll need to weigh all the safety regulations over against the quality of worship we want to have. We do know that we will not be able to celebrate the Eucharist safely for some time.

3. We need a comprehensive plan for the gradual re-opening of our buildings in a way that will be safe for everyone. There is an overwhelming amount of information, advice, legal and canonical requirements pouring out of national and state government, public health agencies, our diocese, other faith communities, the medical and scientific community. We must read, mark, learn and inwardly digest it all to arrive at an allowable, reasonable and safe plan that works for us, our particular buildings, our particular community, our particular needs. As if the amount of information were not challenge enough, we must also keep track of the constant changes to it!

So, what are we doing?

We are putting together a Re-Opening Advisory Team of parishioners with expertise and experience in the several areas we need to consider: worship, pastoral, health and medical, facilities, legal, employee/employer concerns, and so on. This group will be responsible for creating our plan. By next week I'll be able to share their names with you. Our organizing meeting will be the week after and we will get to work. When we deem it safe to begin re-opening, we will be ready.

I wish I could just say, "Let's all just go back to church." But I can't. It would be unwise, dangerous – a dereliction, really, of my responsibility for the well-being of every member of our community.

This will not be forever. When we finally can be together, when we can welcome all who come, when we can pray and rejoice with one another in our sacred space without fear of a dangerous disease, then will we know the joy of the people of Israel when they returned from their exile in Babylon. And perhaps we will have done what they did while in exile – grow in ways deliberate and ways unexpected in our relationship with God and one another.

With love for you in Christ,
Janet+

1. "Hope is the thing with feathers" Emily Dickinson from *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson. Copyright © 1951, 1955, 1979, 1983 the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

REMINDERS

Wednesday Evening Conversation and Compline via Zoom, Wednesdays at 7:00 – 8:15 p.m. Watch for the Zoom invitation and link in your email Wednesday morning.

Read the Weekly every Friday for the latest parish news and information about parish events and opportunities for worship and connection.

Please remember: all our buildings are closed until further notice. Only parish staff may be in the buildings, for essential work only, with a very few office volunteers, one at a time, for tasks requiring their presence. For the safety of our staff and volunteers, and so that they may observe required safety precautions, please do not use your key to enter any of the buildings. Multicare staff continue to work in their Trinity House offices, observing the same required safety precautions.