

Dear Leominster Church Family Letter #6

Greetings once again from 618 Silver Lake St. where we are still “sheltering in place.” My question... Why do we need coded language to say something everybody knows means, “Stuck at home?” My answer... “I hesitate to articulate in fear that I may deviate upon the highest degree of accuracy.” Oops, I meant to say, “I don’t know!”

I remember the first time I entered this home where I’m now writing to you. It was July and I was driving over here in my 1967 Chevy Malibu to pick Pam up for our first date. She had given me the address but I didn’t write it down so I had to ask again, to which she replied, “The house with the big trees in the front.” So I drive down the street and I don’t know, maybe it was nerves, but every house looked like it was guarded by giant sequoias. So I drove past what I thought was the house, but wasn’t sure. I turned around and drove by again. GPS wasn’t an option, (unless it meant Go Past Sequoias) which I had done a third time by now. In my defense I thought, “the house with the big trees in front,” well that’s pretty subjective, I mean “big” is a very relative word...(i.e. “Big” Mac, easily held with one hand.) Well, Pam had been watching me drive back and forth in front of the house and took pity on me. She came onto the front porch and very kindly flagged me down, directing me into the driveway. As I walked up the steps and into the room where I’m writing this letter, I was worried that this lovely girl would think I wasn’t too bright. Not true. Not too bright and directionally challenged (code for gets lost in a paper bag) are clearly two different things. Well, that was 46 years ago. The big trees that were blocking the numbers 618 have long been cut down. Pam is still giving me directions because I still get easily lost. But she’s still very kindly about it. Can’t you hear the inflection in her voice as she says, “Dear, do you think it might be a good time to take out the GPS?”

This has been a challenging week, with a couple of dismal days. This Covid-19 thing has a way of wearing you down. Can I hear an Amen? In hard times we intuitively gather together, we put our arms around each other or just place a caring hand on a stooped shoulder, but of course these are not options now. I think of all those people in critical condition in hospitals. Normally, a nurse or hospital chaplain would contact the family and the pastor would be called to give comfort, support and offer prayer. But again, none of this can happen. I close my eyes and see the tears of that compassionate health care worker holding up a cell phone to a dying patient’s ear or providing 45 seconds of Facetime, knowing it’s probably their last chance they will have to say or hear the words, “I love you.” Have you found the pain around us too much at times? Have you found yourself getting anesthetized to all this loss when the news anchor informs us of some “good news”... where there were only 489 deaths in one day, in one city, down from over 600. But that’s 489 people, many of whom six weeks ago were playing with their grandchildren, planning a vacation or thinking about what to plant in their garden this year. But now, no funeral, no memorial service, no chance for the only thing that matters at a time

like this, human touch. Some small consolation we can find in all of this loss is that God, in His loving mercy, created us with the capacity to experience only so much pain, and then we just shut down. He knows we can only take so much. But friends, it isn't so with Jesus. To Him, "Our world is a...vast scene of misery that we dare not allow even our thoughts to dwell upon. Did we realize it as it is, the burden would be too terrible. Yet God feels it all." Education 264 He weeps for the affliction and the suffering of every soul.

So what do we do in the midst of this pain and suffering? We all face the temptation at times to give into hopelessness and despondency. But here's where we must hold fast to the promises of God. We must find creative ways to get our thinking away from our feelings and onto our faith. May I share with you what never fails to help me in times of trouble? It's the last chapter of a little book most of you have on your shelf entitled "Steps to Christ." The last chapter, "Rejoicing in the Lord" is filled with wonderful and practical council for times just like we're going through today. Here's one example... "It is not the will of God that His people should be weighed down with care. But our Lord does not deceive us. He does not say to us, "Do not fear; there are no dangers in your path." He knows there are trials and dangers, and He deals with us plainly. He does not propose to take His people out of a world of sin and evil, but He points them to a never-failing refuge... In the world," He says, "ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Today, Jesus very kindly directs us to how He overcame... by faith, prayer and unwavering confidence in His Father's love. Friend, be of good cheer, so can you.

May He hold you fast is our prayer for you.  
Pastor Mark and Pam