

Dear Leominster Church Family

Letter #8

“Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” You will recognize this greeting as one the apostle Paul used a number of times when writing his epistles to the various churches he established. Since last we’ve met, I trust that the two distinguishing characteristics of this salutation, God’s abounding grace and His heaven born peace have sustained, upheld and comforted you through these tumultuous eight weeks. Let me share a couple of experiences that I’ve had recently at the “manse.” (Millennials will have to Google that)

The first one was a problem I’m sure many of you can relate to and that is an unexpected charge that shows up on your credit card. Now being the kind of person who doesn’t just take for granted that the good people at Chase Visa always get it right, I go over my statement each month to account for every purchase. As I did, I discovered a charge for \$3.99 from Amazon. I thought and I thought, then I thought some more... “What could this be for?” but to no avail. I looked at my receipts which I meticulously save and found no record. Couldn’t get through to any customer service reps, because evidently, due to Covid-19, they’re all home! Now I know that \$3.99 is not a lot of money, but having grown up with a grandmother who was a bank teller for 40 years, lived through the Great Depression and who I heard tell me “*pennies make dollars*” a thousand times, you can guess I *wasn’t* going to do what the title song from “*Frozen*” says, “Let It Go!”

So picture me sitting at the kitchen table pondering my dilemma. I decided to get my mind off this annoying problem by working on a mundane report the conference asks for each month. While at this task, I was taking advantage of another woman who lives in my house. Her name is “Alexa.” (Millennials will *not* have to Google this.) All I have to do is say, “Alexa, what’s the weather?” or “Alexa, tell me a joke.” Or Alexa, give me the headlines.” Now the *best thing* about this little piece of gadgetry is that it gives me access to 60 million songs! I can say, “Alexa, play *Pennsylvania Polka*.” (Pam’s half Polish). I can say, “Alexa, play, “*Some Enchanted Evening*” from South Pacific (my Dad loves musicals) Or “Alexa, play music for cooking.” (I’m serious!) The *worst thing* is that I forget I have this incredible device, so I don’t use it like I should, especially

since it's free! Well, I wasn't in the mood for polkas or musicals, or cooking tunes, so I decided to request my "go to" song during this eight week confinement. So I said, "Alexa, play, *He Will Hold Me Fast* by Selah." Instantly, as always, Alexa, with her computer generated voice responds, "*He Will Hold Me Fast* by Selah on *Amazon Music*." Then it hit me. Would Amazon give me access to 60 million songs for free? Sure they would, for a 30 day trial! Then of course, you have to pay. Well, you already know how much they charged my credit card so I won't bore you with the details. But I think I'll keep Alexa. I wonder what songs I'd hear if I said, "Alexa, play music for a pandemic!"

The second incident came a few nights ago just as we were going to bed. As I went upstairs I noticed an odd light shining into the bathroom window. I looked out and noticed it was coming from the house diagonally down the hill. I was able to see a man standing on his back porch who was purposely shining this very powerful light intentionally at our house. A minute went by, then another minute and then it was starting to get annoying, because by now I knew it wasn't an accident. My first thought was this guy had been frequenting the local liquor store (considered essential business in Mass.) and in a stupor had decided to have some fun at our expense with his million candle power sunbeam that by now was disturbing my sleep! Finally, he stopped and I chalked it up to crazy things people do during 50 day national shutdowns.

Well the next day I was out in my backyard when suddenly a stranger approaches me from the street. He was coming at me rather quickly, inquiring in somewhat of an excited tone, "Is this your house?" "Do you live here?" I told him I did. (No mask, but thankfully he halted at an appropriate social distance.) Then he asked... "Did you get my signal last night?" I questioned, "Your signal?" "Yes, I'm your neighbor and last night I saw the biggest bear I've ever seen in my life in your backyard. I didn't know your number and no way was I going out of my house, so I tried to get your attention by shining a light at your window. Did you see it?" Oh by the way, did I happen to mention why I was out in my backyard? It was to see what I could do to salvage my totally destroyed bird feeder system! That man, who I was sure was out to annoy me, was trying to warn me, to save me from the loss of my beloved feeders which hung from a pole now bent almost completely to the ground.

Friends, is it possible the world might be seeing this pandemic as just a great annoyance, a big inconvenience to our lives, when in reality, a loving God is trying to warn us of destruction that is right in *our* backyard? Could it be that in His great love for us, He's shining the accumulated light of the ages into our sleepy spiritual condition because He's too much our Friend to remain silent when we're pursuing a course that would ruin our souls? If Alexa could speak for Jesus, wouldn't she say, "***Wake up, get ready, watch!***" But we don't need Alexa for this do we, we have His Word that's already told us. The question is, "Are we listening?"

Let me close with this... "Transgression has almost reached its limit. Confusion fills the world, and a great terror is soon to come upon human beings. The end is very near. We who know the truth should be preparing for what is soon to break upon the world as an overwhelming surprise. Testimonies, Vol. 8 pg. 28.

I'm thankful for a stranger who warned me and tried to save me with his light. Let's take heed to our Friend and Savior, Jesus.... who's trying to do the same.

In Christ, Pastor Mark and Pam