



Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

the little church with a big heart!

THOUGHTS ALONG THE WAY...

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart.

—Jeremiah 29:11-13

I've been thinking a lot about these verses from Jeremiah. This was the passage Pastor George Johnson gave to me as my Confirmation Verse when I was fourteen years old. I had to memorize it and recite it before the congregation at my Confirmation. I've kept it close to my heart over the years—almost 53 years now since I was confirmed—and thought about it often, especially when times were difficult or uncertain.

As you may imagine, these three verses have been particularly dear to me. When I was younger I often thought of them as mine, as if God had given them just to me, personally. But that, of course, is not the case. God did not give them just to me. For that matter, God did not give them just to Jeremiah almost 2700 years ago. These verses were spoken to all the people of Judah during a very, very dark time in a series of dark times.

During the 6th century BCE, Judah had become a political and economic football, caught between Assyria, Babylon and Egypt. No sooner had the Assyrian empire fallen in Babylon's rebellion than Egypt swept in and took control of Jerusalem. That didn't last long. Egypt was defeated by Babylon and Jerusalem was part of the spoils. The Babylonians set up Zedekiah as a vassal king, but in 589 BCE, Zedekiah rebelled and the Babylonians laid siege to the city. Following two years of extreme deprivation and starvation, the Babylonians broke through the weakened defenses. In 587 BCE, much of Jerusalem was destroyed, including the temple, and the Babylonians started taking captives back to Babylon. The deportation started with the ruling elite—government officials and priests—who were taken so they wouldn't stir up another rebellion at home and so they could be put to administrative use in Babylon, but it soon expanded to include laborers taken to work as slaves in building Nebuchadnezzar's great capitol.

This was a time that seemed dark and hopeless to the people of Judah. They felt that God had abandoned them. It was hard to imagine that God had any plans for them beyond their dispersal and destruction. It was nearly impossible to imagine any future at all for their nation, much less a "future with hope." And this is when God spoke to them through Jeremiah. "Surely I know the plans I have for you..."

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Thoughts Along the Way Continues.....

It's interesting that in the verse just before this, God set a limit on Babylon's time. "For thus says the LORD: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place." –Jeremiah 29:10 That 70 year prediction turned out to be just about right. Babylon fell to the Persians and the Medes. The people of Judah came home. The temple was rebuilt. Life got back to normal.

These are trying times for all of us, more trying for some than for others, but not easy for any of us. It is still early days for us in dealing with Covid-19, early days of self-imposed quarantine and isolation, early days of figuring out how and when to get groceries, early days of figuring out how to stay connected and how to be church with only electronic media and phone calls and maybe the U.S. Mail service. It's too soon to be too optimistic and it's soul-crushing to be too pessimistic. But it is always the right time to have a clear-eyed trust that God is with us, that God knows and loves us and that God is at work in the midst of all this. "You shall seek me and you shall find me when you search for me with all your heart." Word of wisdom, word of life.

Eventually, probably after a longer time than any of us would like, this thing will run its course. Life will get back to something closer to normal, although I think we will probably have a new normal with new understandings of a great many things, not the least of which is how precious we are to each other.

In the meantime, stay safe. Wash your hands. Keep good social distance when and if you find a need to go out—but mostly don't go out. Pray for each other. Pray for the church. Pray for me, please. Pray for the world. Pray for a cure. May God bless and keep you.

Pro Gloria Dei,

Pastor Steve

P.S.—Please try to check in once a week on our Community Connection online meetings using Zoom. It's really not difficult. Links are on our website.



Don't be afraid, for
I am with you.
Don't be
discouraged, for I
am your God.
I will strengthen
you and help you.
I will hold you up
with my victorious
right hand.
Isaiah 41:10



None of us could have anticipated this new normal: major events canceled, businesses closed and schools suspended indefinitely. In less than a year's time, our entire world has changed, leaving us steeped in uncertainty about the future. Many Christians pray for relief and healing. Be consoled that the Lord is moving among us during this time.

Several churches are live-streaming their services on social media and their websites. This is making the gospel readily accessible and visible to the world. Like never before, the church is on display and the gospel message is being shared.

Mothers and fathers are spending more time with their children, old friends are reconnecting, dinner time is taking place with everyone around the table, and men and women are working less and resting more. This cessation of constant activity gives us an opportunity to glorify God through our rest in Him. In the midst of this global pandemic, God is teaching us the power and benefit of rest.

Since COVID 19, the entire family unit, in some cases, has been restricted to their homes. Although it can be perceived as a hardship this may be the sovereignty of God giving us an opportunity to spend time with those most closest to us thereby strengthening the family. God is blessing family members with an opportunity to spend time with their loved ones which might not have happened otherwise.

Our present crisis, however, has stripped us of confidence in anything other than God. We cannot place our faith in money, healthcare, or mankind. None of these options are as secure as the unchanging nature of God. During this time, God is moving on our hearts and causing us to place our faith in Him: recognizing He is the only One powerful enough to sustain and deliver us completely from this global epidemic. God's word reminds us of this in **Psalm 46:1** when it says, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." We are urged through God's word and His spirit to place our faith in Him and Him alone.

1 Corinthians 13:4 reminds us that love is kind and God is love. The acts of kindness from people are a display of God's love exhibited through the hands and feet of humanity. When we see people caring about health care workers, the elderly, or those with pre-existing conditions, this is a reminder of God's infinite love displayed through mankind.

God is moving in the hearts of mankind, urging us to forgive others and love as He loves us. Our time on this earth is not promised and the global pandemic is a vivid reminder of that. God's spirit encourages us to forgive others during this time just as it says in **Colossians 3:13**, "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

Rather than fixating on all that is wrong in our world, we can fortify our faith by looking for examples of God in the midst of this global pandemic. Although things appear to be bleak, there are hopeful glimpses of our heavenly Father everywhere. We see him in the faces and actions of other believers, in nature, through the pages of Scripture, and in the resiliency of those on the front lines battling the pandemic.

Source: Kia Stephens, iBelieve Contributor
7 Ways God Is Moving in the Midst of a Global Pandemic



GLORIA DEI — CHURCH UPDATE

Living with the corona virus leaves us with so many questions and, unfortunately, not enough answers. Some of our questions, of course, are about how we are to do and be church. We have been trying hard to adapt to this new reality as we go and praying that it doesn't last too long. Bob Siemer has been amazingly helpful and resourceful in helping us get up to speed in using Zoom for online worship and community meetings. It's not the same as being together in person, but it is the best way for us to be together that we have available to us right now, so I hope you'll take advantage of it. As for dates and times and other practical matters, here is where things stand and what we know right now.

1. In keeping with the governor's order, CDC guidelines, and City of Long Beach orders, the church building is currently closed. All regular gatherings and meetings are suspended until we are given the "all clear" by both state and local authorities. In this instance, state and local direction will supersede federal advice since these authorities have a clearer picture of what conditions are with the contagion in our area. Outside groups who meet in our facilities have also suspended their meetings. Any necessary meetings for church business, e.g., Church Council meeting on April 6, will be conducted online through Zoom.

2. The earliest date given so far when we might be able to gather together again in the church building was in the initial statewide order. That date was April 19, but it was also stated that the quarantine could be extended. Some communicable disease experts are saying that this situation could go on for as long as 18 months. School districts are planning to be out until May and some for the rest of the school year. The fact is that right now our return date is not known. A lot depends on how the pandemic progresses and if we as a nation are able to flatten the curve and keep it contained. That, of course, depends on everyone following the guidelines and staying home.

3. So what does that mean for Holy Week? Well, any way you look at it, we won't be back in our building in time for Holy Week and Easter. We will have online services, but we'll save our big celebration of Easter for our first service when we're able to gather together again in our building. So the schedule will be like this:

April 5—Palm/Passion Sunday – Online worship, reading of the Passion – 10:30 a.m.

April 9 – Maundy Thursday – Online Worship – 7:00 p.m.

April 10 – Good Friday – The 7 Last Words of Christ – 7:00 p.m.

April 12 – Easter Sunday – Online Worship – 10:30 a.m.

Obviously this will be quite different from our usual Holy Week. There's really no way to do our annual Meal in the Upper Room, for instance. Foot Washing or even Remote Communion are not practical; our bishop has already reminded us that our Lutheran theology of the sacrament focuses on our being together in community. Good Friday, with the Last Words of Christ won't exactly be a Tenebrae because extinguishing the candles and dimming the light by internet is a little beyond our technical wizardry. And, while we will observe the resurrection of Christ on Easter Sunday, we will save our big celebration of the day until we can be together again, so in a way we'll have two Easters this year. I wish I could tell you when that day will be, but right now there's really no way of knowing.

I wish I had more cheerful and more definite news for you. I wish I could say that we'll reopen the church on such and such a date, but right now it is best to remain cautious. In the meantime, keep each other, the world, and all those who are putting themselves at risk to serve other in prayer. Check in to the online gatherings. Join in the online worship. We are still the church. Christ is still with us and working through us and the Spirit will continue to empower us to get through this. Together. Even though we are apart.

God bless and keep us all, Pastor Steve

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.

— Proverbs 3:5

Finance Report from Gary Bockman

In this time of Covid-19 disruption Gloria Dei's finances are adequate to pay our current operating expenses, but we definitely need your continued support going forward. Thank you to those who have continued your normal giving this past month. Gloria Dei has switched to **online payments** for many of the churches bills, including monthly IRS payroll tax deposits, utilities, insurance and those vendors that offer this service. You might also **consider using Gloria Dei's website to make online contributions**, it cuts down on the paperwork at church and trips to the bank. Electronic payments are secure and processed by Vanco Payment Solutions through the ACH (Automated Clearing House) which is used by most government and financial institutions in the U.S. Paper is still welcome though, and we thank you again for your continued support of Gloria Dei's ministry.

NAPLES • STRONG

Strength and Resilience in Community

The **Naples Improvement Association** and the **Naples Island Business Association** are collaboratively launching a 'Naples Strong' community campaign celebrating the strength and resilience of residents and merchants. It will serve as a message board to help share island-specific updates, including merchant updates, tips from area officials, and links to expert sites. It plans to share info from **LB CERT-Naples, Naples Neighborhood Watch and Naples Island Garden Club**.

Learn more on their webpage:
naplesisland.org/strong

TECH Report from Bob Siemer

If a test was ever devised to see whether the church is actually its people, we have experienced and I suggest, passed the test. It's one thing to say that technology should enhance worship, it's another to say the technology must deliver worship. In the period of two hectic weeks, we are learning that we can, with or without being seen and with or without a computer/tablet/mobile, meet online. In these times of isolation, the meetings should remind us that we are one and cared for. I thought a few of us would gather in the sanctuary and do church for the rest of us. Instead we've learned that readings, music and sermons can come from home and we can still worship together. I invite you to follow the directions linked to the front of our website to join either the Tuesday or Thursday **Stay Connected** meeting and/or **Sunday Worship**. If you are unable to go to the site, call me (562.439.0505) and I'll mail you the directions to call in. Though tested by this current circumstance, we remain a church.

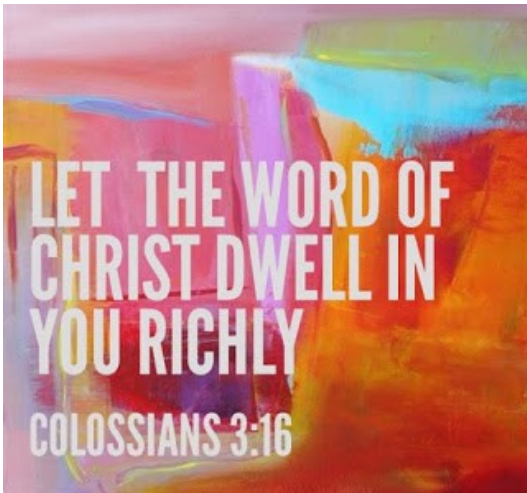
The more we can feel like we are in control, the calmer we'll be. And one thing you can control is your media intake. — David Rock, co-founder of the NeuroLeadership Institute & author of Your Brain at Work

Community Resources

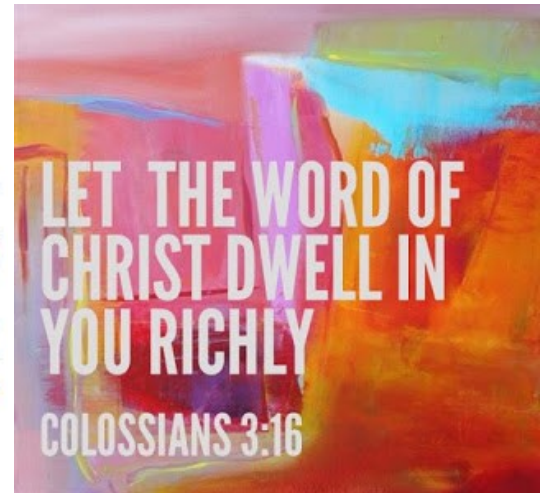
Source: Suzie Price, Councilwoman, 3rd District

City Leaders urge residents to remain calm & thank them for taking responsibility to help protect our community.

- **Up-to-date Local Information:**
www.longbeach.gov/COVID19 You can also **<https://www.ready.gov/pandemic>**
- **Follow @LongBeachCity** on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for guidance. **City residents are encouraged to sign-up for AlertLongBeach** to receive emergency notifications to your mobile phone or email.



LOVE
JUSTICE
& SERVICE



ELCW Report from Stephanie Siemer

Our Gloria Dei ELCW women's group meets at 11:00 in the Church Fellowship Hall the 3rd Thursday of most months except July and August.

All women are welcome. We have devotions, work on a project and enjoy the opportunity for fellowship with each other during lunch.

At the January meeting we discussed projects for the year and set a schedule. Here is our ministry plan for 2020:

FEBRUARY – Rice and Beans for Fe Y Esperanza

MARCH – Hygiene Kits for Lutheran Social Services

APRIL – Baby Clothes for Precious Life

MAY – Tour of Precious Life / Lunch at Katella Deli (tentative)

JUNE – Lunch at Shenandoah Café in Rossmoor

JULY – No meeting

AUGUST – No meeting

SEPTEMBER – Hygiene Kits for Lutheran Social Services

OCTOBER – Maritime Ministry Christmas Boxes

NOVEMBER – Turkeys for Fe Y Esperanza

DECEMBER – Decorate Gloria Dei's Chrismon tree

At our February meeting we divided 100 pounds rice and 100 pounds of pinto beans into family sized zip-lock bags. When we delivered the packets to **Fe Y Esperanza** the following Saturday, we received a warm and thankful welcome from Pastor Marta. Thanks again to everyone who supports our local church partner in South Gate. They are doing a great job serving their congregants and their community.

The March meeting has been cancelled and possibly our April meeting due to the COVID - 19 pandemic. Please plan to join us when life normalizes and we are scheduled to meet again. Check our Facebook page for updates.

**God is the only one who can make the valley of trouble
a door of hope. — Hosea 2:15**

THE POWER OF PRAYER

Dear God,

You remind us over and over through the power of your words not to be afraid, never to be held back by fear or defeat. And yet, all too often, we find ourselves gripped in its stronghold, struggling to be free and to trust you more. Thank you that your perfect love truly does cast out all fear.

That the power of your Spirit within our lives is more powerful than the enemy or any battle we may face.

Thank you that you alone can bring us victory the world can never take away.

And we are more than conquerors through your love and power. We leave our doubts, fears, and worries safely in your mighty hands, and trust that you will take care of all that concerns us in your perfect timing and ways.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Birthdays & Anniversaries



APRIL 3

Happy Birthday Peggy Bockman

APRIL 7

Roger & Judy Powell Anniversary

APRIL 8

Happy Birthday Lanae Caldwell

APRIL 11

Al & Judi Mellow Anniversary

APRIL 13

Happy Birthday Beverly Pandora

APRIL 16

Happy Birthday Donna Malbon

APRIL 20

Happy Birthday Don Melin

APRIL 23

Happy Birthday David Fuller

APRIL 28

Happy Birthday Brooke White

HOLY WEEK AND EASTER

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April 10 – Good Friday – The 7 Last Words of Christ – 7:00 p.m.

April 12 – Easter Sunday – Online Worship – Rejoice with us at 10:30 a.m.

His mercies
are new
every
morning

Lamentations 3:23

GLORIA DEI EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

**5872 Naples Plaza
Long Beach, California 90803**



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Gloria Dei Lutheran Church is a Reconciling in Christ Congregation. At Gloria Dei Lutheran Church we welcome all who are seeking God's love and grace. We welcome all because God welcomes all, regardless of race or culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, or relationship status. We welcome all without regard to the social, cultural or economic circumstances that too often divide us. Our unity is in Christ in whom we are all made new.

(2 Cor. 5:17-19)

