

## Minister's Message

Dear Friends,

On the occasion of First Church's 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration in 1905, the Rev. Edward Hawes wrote of the secular spirit of the times (even then!) and the increasingly prevalent desire to "[ignore] the relation of human misery to human sin." As we enter into Holy Week, it seems to me that we are, again, being asked to explore the deeply interconnectedness of suffering and sin. I do not mean, as some [very bad theology] would have you believe, that this virus is some sort of divine punishment for wrong-doing. Nor do I mean that this virus is something of our own doing. No, I mean that this virus has laid bare the connection between suffering and sin in much the same way that first Holy Week did, 2,000 years ago: it demonstrates, with a clarity that is unavoidable, the ways in which our social and economic structures fail the most vulnerable – even, sometimes, unto their death.

Hourly workers, grocery store clerks, restaurant and warehouse employees, all are being asked to work, often without even the benefit of sick leave or health insurance. If they aren't being asked to work, they have been laid-off and are now standing in bread lines that rival those of the Great Depression. Those with the least access to health care – particularly in places like India and Africa – will die from a disease spread around the world by the richest among us. Doctors fear that Black communities are being refused testing for the virus. In Detroit, the virus has revealed that, as part of a debt-collection program, over 140,000 households have had their water shut off – life-threatening, as we now know, in an era of isolation and necessary hand-washing.

Friends, this is the holiest of Holy Weeks I have ever experienced. And as difficult as it is, I am asking you to not look away. NOT by watching the news constantly, or refreshing your social media feeds ad-nauseum, but rather by focusing your attention on the cross. It is there precisely for times such as this. In it, in these rituals of Palm Sunday, Maundy (Commandment) Thursday, Good Friday and Easter, we are certain to find *precisely* what we need in this time – reckoning, reconciliation, and yes, even resurrection.



*There are several ways you can enter into the sacredness of these weeks, most of them listed below:*

- Join our worship on Palm Sunday and listen for how to participate in our “shelter-in-place parade.” (Make sure to bring some bread, crackers, and juice if you have it!)
- Sponsor a [“virtual lily”](#) in honor or memory of someone you love; their name will be listed in our Easter bulletin, and proceeds will go to the church.
- Join us for a special Tenebrae worship on Thursday evening at 7, as we contemplate what it means to abandon Jesus, when we are all, physically, on our own.
  - We need 16 volunteers to sign up for hour-long slots for our first-ever Vigil – spanning from the conclusion of our Maundy Thursday service at 8pm, to the beginning of our Good Friday service at noon on Friday. (If you would like to know more about what the Vigil entails, [click here](#), and [sign-up for your Vigil slot here](#).)
- Of course, I also hope you will join us for our Easter Morning worship, which will be streamed at 10am on Sunday. We need resurrection this year, more than ever.

We are also acutely aware that not everyone will be able to complete their pledges this year, for all the reasons named above. We hope, therefore, that if you find yourself in a financially stable place, you will consider making a special, additional gift to our [Easter Offering](#), outside of your regular pledge. This year the offering will go directly to our operating budget, with a tithe of 10% going to *Justice For All*, the non-profit organization selected by Outreach precisely for its efforts to combat the systemic inequality exposed so clearly now. You can do so by [clicking here](#), or using any of the methods outlined below.

You see, the Rev. Hawes concluded his Anniversary letter by stating that First Church stood as a “visible protest against pessimism,” and “as a substantial declaration of belief in spiritual realities. It is itself proof that there are those who feel that things... for the worship of God are worth paying for. It is a creed, repeated with new emphasis, concerning the relation of the visible to the invisible – of the temporal to the eternal.” His words were clearly prophetic, as they remain as true now, as they were in 1905. Together, let us ensure they remain true for the next 100 years as well.

In faith,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elissa".

[The Rev. Elissa Johnk](#)