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## **Our Sabbatical**

"My help comes from God, the maker of heaven and earth." Psalm 121:2

Dear Ones,

Thirteen weeks ago the world changed and we parted company. None of us could have imagined then that our social distancing could be so deep or so long. That is probably a good thing! I am not sure that we would have agreed to do it if we *had* known. It is now clear that this Long Pause, as I have come to think of it, will likely go even longer. For the most frail among us, it is not clear when social isolation will end.

And that raises many questions. The one that I want to lift up today has to do with church. The COVID-19 Reopening Working Group met for the first time last week, to ponder how and when we will reopen our church building. Lots to think about there! It is complicated and significant. We want to do this right! I suspect it will take us some time to work through this.

But those conversations have sparked a deeper question in me: what is the church building for? Jesus didn't have one. It is clear that he and the disciples worshiped in the synagogues, but they certainly didn't look after one. It's a bit humorous to think about it! There is the burly fisherman Peter vacuuming the floor. And over there, Mary the Mother of Jesus is clearing snow off the stoop. Good grief.

Movements don't have buildings. Institutions have buildings. In a movement you just follow the leader, and listen with rapt attention, and try to become the new person that the leader convinces you that you can be! An institution is heavier. More ponderous and weighty. Structures have to grow up to support what was learned in the movement before the leader left or died. Structures might be physical – like a building to gather in. Or they might be theoretical – like setting apart people to be ministers, or electing a council. Either way, they are way less sexy than what a movement has to offer, and, frankly, a LOT of work.

So here we are now, in The Long Pause, acting more like a movement than an institution! We have closed the building and left it behind as we, the church, have moved down the road. Using the internet and the telephone we have created new spaces, non-physical spaces in which to gather. We are trying very hard not to leave anyone behind! And I think we have succeeded.

But soon – I don't know when exactly – we will unlock the door of the building and move into "the new normal" of public life with COVID-19. We will pick up those other pieces again, knowing that, heavy as they are, they serve to anchor us through the storms of life. A building is somewhere to come home to!

And that is a good thing. Like many of you, I can't wait to get back to it! But – just for now – let's notice that *we are still the church* even when we are not physically together. And in some ways, this is easier, less demanding, or lighter on the spirit. Certainly for the folks who keep our building clean! But for all of us. It is easier to attend meetings on-line from the comfort of home. It is easier to integrate weekly meditation when you can tune in to The Gathered Community on Facebook. It is easier to carve out prayer time, or bible reading, or time with God when you aren't rushing out the door to do The Work of the church.

Maybe ... maybe?... this is a time to reset our spiritual compasses, as if we were on a sabbatical. This could be a time to ask, has doing The Work of the church deflected me from doing work on my soul? Have I let busy-ness substitute for centredness? Have I let my task list of Important Things To Do define my value, rather than knowing that my status as a beloved child of God is my true value?

I imagine that for you, as for me, there is no yes/no answer to those questions. It's more of a balancing act. I teeter between the polls, loving the church work, and also needing the soul work.

But maybe today is a good day to lift up the soul work – since the building is doing fine without us at the moment – and make it a real priority. Because the truth is, we might never get a chance like this again!

Grace to you, and peace.

Kate

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