

5 April 2020 (*Palm Sunday*)

Dear Friends of Elmwood,

This is my third weekly letter to you. I think I'll be sending many more. The need for physical distancing no longer feels so 'new', does it? But neither does it feel 'normal'. The 'powers-that-be' have strongly hinted this will carry on for a long time – not weeks but months. But it's hard to fathom how this could ever feel normal, never mind a 'new normal'.

The toilet paper wars feel like a distant frolic now, don't they? Children sent home from school with a bounce in their step secretly long for a return to the classroom, if only to play with friends at recess. People glad to have a week or two off work are now anxious about life without any work at all – or pay. Even naive clergy, scrambling to lead worship each Sunday, quietly welcomed a respite. But now, at the beginning of this Holy Week, they long to lead others in prayer and celebrate holy communion. No, let this not be the 'new normal'.

The ripple effects of 'flattening the curve' threaten to flatten other things too – people's homes, jobs, livelihoods, and mental health. I worry very much for those who were already underpaid, under-housed, and under-appreciated in our society. They're so very vulnerable. They're chronically overlooked. They'll be at kicking end of things once again and will suffer even more because of it. As so often happens in times of crisis, a remedy meant to tackle one, single problem creates many new ones, each crying out for its own remedy. It's like pitching a tent in a storm. You get one corner pegged down while the others flap furiously in the breeze. But just when you try to secure the next corner, the first one lets go again.

Still, Netflix calls to us. It won't watch itself, now, will it?

On the other hand, it's a shame to waste a good crisis. People can be resourceful and courageous, finding reserves of resilience they never knew they had. I suspect that, in addition to tackling the junk in the closet that "we've never had the time to deal with" (thanks to Netflix), we've also been mentally sorting through our lives, and how we live them, to discover their true treasure, separating things that matter from those that don't, and

deciding how we'll keep the first and ditch the second when 'normal life' resumes.

There's a thrill and renewed sense of life when we seize opportunity, take responsibility, reach out to others, and fashion a 'new normal' that's truer and better than before. Maybe we can't pitch the tent in this storm. But one day we will.

I'm attaching to this email material you can use for worship, alone or with others. Use it and share it as seems right to you. I'll send more for Good Friday and for Easter.

I will be in the sanctuary at Elmwood at our usual time to worship, physically alone but with you still. Meanwhile, "love your neighbour like Jesus but wash your hands like Pilate."

Yours in the faith,

Andrew