

HOW TO HANDLE THE CORONA CRISIS

March 29, 2020

Rev. Richard Maraj

Rev. Richard Maraj: Morning, everyone! And welcome!

And, I've got to tell you... While it's only been two weeks since we've been doing these videos, it feels like two months! I miss you guys so, so much! But I'm thrilled that we at least get to meet this way, and continue to be inspired together as we move through this crisis.

Also, just want to let you know that we're adding some Zoom online classes you can check out; we're doing some on Mondays and Tuesdays, so you can check those out on the website.

Of course, we're continuing to pray for everyone impacted by the virus, and praying for the highest and best and most positive outcome possible.

So today we have a fabulous service for you. Rusty Ferracane's going to sing for us! But let us begin first by preparing ourselves for a time of meditation.

MEDITATION

Rev. Lori Fleming: I invite you to close your outer eyes, to make yourself comfortable in your seat, to begin to move our awareness into our heart space: into the very depths of our souls. Into that place of peace that passes understanding. In this activity of prayer and meditation, we feel our awareness move closer to the God of our understanding. We feel a deep and profound connection with unconditional Divine love: lifting us up. Vitalizing us. Enlivening every cell in our body. Keeping us healthy and whole.

In this time of Spring – of renewal – we are reminded of a life force within us. As we watch the trees put out new leaves and flowers, we know that our bodies also have the ability to heal every cell. To be filled with life and love and the activity of Spirit to bring us to a higher level of health and wholeness than we already have known. We say "*Thank you, God*" for this activity of having a vital spirit. We know that our bodies are self-healing mechanisms that bring about wholeness. We celebrate the life force within us. As God's vitality is flowing through us, we are rejuvenated and we are brought back to wholeness.

We know, God, that we are all one, and that each and every one of us is a divine expression, here by divine appointment. And so, God, we take our strength from you to do what is ours to do: joyfully, peacefully, with wild abandon living this amazing life.

And so we take just a few moments to move more deeply into the silence, where we feel the Spirit and activity of God's presence within.

SILENCE

Sweet Spirit, we come in gratitude for this time together, knowing that, when we pray and meditate, it brings us closer to you, Oh, God. We say thank you for all of our blessings; thank you for all of our friends; thank you for our families and our jobs and our relationships, and all the good that we celebrate in our lives right now. Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you God! And it is so. Amen.

SONG:

Rusty Ferracane: '*Bridge of Light*' (accompanied by Craig Bohmler on piano)

Just when you think hope is lost
And giving up is all you got
And blue turns black
Your confidence is cracked
There seems no turning back from here

Sometimes there isn't an obvious explanation
Why the holiest hearts can feel the strongest palpitations

That's when you can build a bridge of light
That's what turns the wrong so right
That's when you can't give up the fight

That's when love turns night time into day
That's when loneliness goes away
That's why you gotta be strong tonight
Only love can build us a bridge of light

When your feet are made of stone
And you're convinced that you're all alone
Look at the stars
Instead of the dark
You'll find your heart shines like the sun

Let's not let our anger get us lost
And the need to be right comes with way too high a cost

That's when love can build a bridge of light
That's what turns the wrong so right
That's when you know it's worth the fight

That's when love turns night time into day
That's when loneliness goes away
That's why you gotta be strong tonight
'Cause only love can build us a bridge of light

Deep breath, take it on the chin
But don't forget to let love back in

That's when love can build a bridge of light
That's what turns the wrong so right
That's when you can't give up the fight

And that's when love turns night time into day
That's when loneliness goes away
That's why you gotta be strong tonight
'Cause only love can build us a bridge of light

Only love can build us a bridge of light

Of light
Of light

MESSAGE

Rev. Richard Maraj: Thank you, Rusty! That was absolutely amazing! Thanks!

Morning again, everyone!

And so this incoming CEO who just replaced the recently fired CEO found a note in his desk with three envelopes from the former CEO. And the note said, "*When you reach a crisis point, open one of these envelopes. Open one envelope per crisis.*" So things are going well for a while, and suddenly they kind of hit a real crisis point. And so he remembers what the note said, so he goes to his desk, opens it up, and opens envelope number one. And it says, "*Blame your predecessor.*" So he follows the advice, and he blames his predecessor, and everyone gets calm, and he gets off the hook. And things are going well. So about four or five months later, there's another crisis that happens. And so, again, he goes back to the drawer, and he pulls it open, and he reads the second envelope. And it says, "*Reorganize.*" So he follows his predecessor's advice again and, like magic, it works. Everything is resolved and settled, and things move on. So another three or four months go by, and they hit another critical point: I mean, a huge crisis. I mean, worse than anything that he's experienced. So, this time, he goes to the desk feeling a little confident that – like the first two times the envelope helped – and the third one will help him get out of this, and they'll move on. So he opens the third envelope, and it says, "*Prepare three envelopes.*"

[Pantomimes a drum roll "rim shot" and chuckles]

I think that's more of a "groaner" than a funny one. But... **[Chuckles]**

You know, over the last two or three weeks, I've received a lot of communications from family and friends, and amazingly, they used the same phrase over and over again. And that phrase is: "*Boy, we certainly are living in interesting times. We're certainly living in an interesting world.*"

And the truth is: we really are! This is the most unprecedeted experience of my life. I've never seen things have to be shut down, like schools and restaurants, churches, cities and countries. I mean, it is not only unprecedeted, it's uncertain. It is challenging. It is concerning. It is devastating and, yes, even deadly. You know, this coronavirus situation has truly reached a level of crisis

You know, in 1966, Robert Kennedy was giving a speech and – about the times they were in – he actually used that exact phrase: that we live in interesting times. He also went on to say, in it, that means that we are in a period that is dangerous and uncertain, but he also said it is a period of opportunity. To use our creative energy and to create a positive outcome that's better than we can imagine right now.

You know, the word "crisis" is actually made up of a combination of two words. And one is "danger" and the other is "opportunity." And the fact is: how we handle this crisis will determine how well we come out of it, and it will also determine how positive the possibilities are and, especially, beyond moving through this situation.

So how do we handle this crisis? How do we handle it personally? How do we handle it emotionally? How do we handle it mentally? How do we handle this time period that we're in? Besides doing the things we know we're meant to do – washing our hands and keeping social distance – what can we do through this crisis to make it the best outcome possible?

The first thing I want to talk about is: **HOW DO WE HANDLE OUR EMOTIONS.** I mean, I don't know how anyone cannot feel concern and sadness and upset seeing so many people suffer. Hearing about the rate of cases increasing – almost doubling – every day. How can we not be concerned about our

families? About our parents? Of our children? How do we not feel concerned about ourselves? You know, this is a time where people are quite worried; there's a lot of fear. There's a lot of anxiety. I mean, we've really reverted sometimes to survival mode! With all the hording – and I've actually seen fighting over groceries and toilet paper and stuff. There's a lot of panic and anxiety, and people are kind of scared.

Nobody ever wants to admit that they're frightened – they don't want to admit that they're scared and panicked and concerned. Sometimes just saying, "*Hey, it's all good! It's all good!*" And I'm not saying there's something bad with that, but sometimes we kind of pretend or deny that we're actually feeling as frightened as we are feeling. Sometimes we want to avoid those kind of negative emotions. But they're really a part of life!

Jesus said, "*In this life, there will be trials and tribulations.*" There are going to be some difficulties! And a part of those difficulties is that there will be pain. There will be loss. There will be heartache. There will be disappointment.

One of the things I love about Jesus: besides acknowledging that there will be trials and tribulations, by his own example he demonstrated and allowed himself to feel all of his feelings. In the shortest verse in the Bible, it says this: "*Jesus wept.*" Jesus not only cried, but Jesus was sad. He got angry. He got frustrated. He felt a little hopeless, and even felt like giving up! Jesus felt all the ranges of being human, without going to either wallowing or getting stuck in it or consumed by it. And, also, not the other extreme of pretending or denying or not feeling it.

Jesus actually allowed himself to feel through all of his feelings without shame, without judgement, without guilt or any negativity. You know, I'm always amazed at how we're afraid to show our emotions. And one of the biggest surprises for me, as a minister... I've done a lot of funerals over the years. And I have seen so many people giving eulogies. And, in the eulogy of a loved one, they will break down and cry, and the first thing they will say is, "*I'm sorry for crying.*" I mean, you would think the safest place – and most understandable place in the world – to allow our emotions, and to cry, to be shown would be at a funeral. And, yet, we have this instinctive thing to want to avoid those feelings: of feeling weak or feeling sad or having negative emotions.

One of the things I really don't like in this world is to get needles. To get poked any way with a needle is just not a thrilling experience for me! I get tense; I get tight. And, once in a while, I'll scream. And it's just not my favorite!

But I remember, years ago, someone was giving me a needle. And she noticed I was tense, the medical professional, and she said, "*Just relax and take a deep breath.*" And my response was, "*So if I relax and take a deep breath, it won't hurt?*" And she said, "*No; it will; but it'll just hurt a lot less.*" [*Laughs*] By not being afraid and relaxing, it's going to be less painful.

And the fact is: by stuffing and denying and burying our feelings, it actually causes us more pain. It's less pain to just actually feel your feelings, and let it move through us. If we keep holding on to it, or pretending, it actually weighs heavy on us, and stays alive, and kind of even eats us up inside. It undermines our happiness. The more we try to control and suppress negative feelings, the more they actually control and undermine us.

You know, we've all heard that expression: "*We are spiritual beings having a human experience.*" We've all heard that. And, yet, when we try to not have our feelings, or pretend they aren't there, it's more like we're spiritual beings trying to avoid a human experience. As part of the experience, there will be sadness. There will be loss. There will be hurt and pain. You can't just skip over and pretend some feelings don't exist, and think you can only experience the good ones.

Joseph Campbell, the mystic, once said that most people think they're looking for the meaning of life, but they're not. What they're actually looking for is an experience of being fully alive. The only way to feel fully alive is to feel all of our feelings. Not with guilt or shame, or wallowing or pretending. But just being honest, and let ourselves feel our feelings. And, just like that needle, it'll move through us, but it will move through with far less pain and more ease, so we can move on to greater things.

The second thing I want to talk about how to handle is: **HOW DO WE HANDLE OUR MINDS?** Have you ever had your mind run wild, and kind of make up stories and negative scenarios? And you start just stressing and getting upset? Sometimes our minds – as wonderful as they are – can really create a lot of drama and a lot of stories. Sometimes we create some horror movies – starring, written and directed by us – of worst case scenarios.

I'll give you an example. In the last week or so, I've had a little tickle in my throat, and I'm like, "Oh, my God! Is everything okay?" I start Googling "tickle in your throat/corona." You know, I had a little sniffle here, or this or that. And it's like, "Is everything okay!?" And we could just start freaking out right by ourselves, in our own place, in our minds.

You know what's the best thing to do in those moments? Is to close our eyes and just take a deep breath. Close your eyes and take another deep breath. And just withdraw from the outer world, and just allow your mind to rest in God. To rest in God's peace. Another deep breath. And now just open your eyes.

And the fact is: that peace that you just felt by taking a breath is always with us. Sometimes we're so tuned in to what's going in to our head, we just need to get back into our heart, to our spirit, and calm and quiet our mind. And peace is our natural state. But, because we get pulled away, we need to quietly breathe, and quiet our minds regularly, to get ourselves more centered.

Jesus, when he was asked about praying, he said, "*When you pray, close the door, and enter that inner chamber, and speak to your Father, who is in secret.*" To close the door means to close the door on the distractions of the busy-ness of our mind, and go within to that quiet place where there is only peace and love. And let your mind be immersed in the mind of God. Because, when we immerse our mind in the mind of God, our minds become godly: we get a peaceful mind; a loving mind; a caring and compassionate mind; an understanding mind. A mind of abundance and possibilities.

And so quieting our mind is a vital and important thing for us to do. And sometimes even when our mind is distracted... If you just can't quiet your mind; if it gets too distracted, sometimes just saying a little mantra like, "God is love. God is love. God is love." Or saying, "God is peace. God is peace." Or, "Remember: God loves me and all is well. God loves me and all is well."

So whichever way – whether it's even a guided meditation. Find a way to just quiet your mind, because that really leads us to God's peace. And just opens and relaxes us to handle things in a greater and better way.

You know, the mind is really the bridge to Spirit. The Apostle Paul said, "*Let the same mind that was in Christ Jesus be in you.*" And so the more we can immerse our mind by quieting ourselves throughout the day... You know, if you're bored, quiet your mind. If you're anxious, quiet your mind. Just do it several times throughout the day. And, while we might get pulled away, the more we come back to center, the more peaceful we'll feel, and the more ease and the more resources we'll have to handle what is before us.

And the final one I want to talk about handling is: **HOW DO WE HANDLE THIS TIME THAT WE'RE IN?** And I want to talk a little about patience.

Have you ever been impatient? Have you ever had something go way slower than you wanted to go faster? It took longer than you wanted? It just wasn't happening quick enough!!! I mean, we all have that! And, even in this situation, already I've thought, *"How long is this going to last? When will this be over? When can we start church again? When will my life get back to the way it used to be? Come on! Hurry! Let's go!"*

We all live in the mindset of, *"I want it, and I want it now."* And, so, when I think about time, I always think of my time. We've got to balance that with God's time. *"I love God; I trust God. I just think he's a little slower than I'd like it to be."* And, so, one of the things to be more patient with time – the foundation of it – is one word: and it's TRUST. Do you trust God? Do you trust that all things are working together for your highest good? Do you trust that God has a plan and purpose for your life? Do you trust that God loves you? Do you trust the process? Do you trust that – even when things are looking different than the way you want, and going slower – that things still will work out in the greatest and best way?

I think one of the greatest examples of demonstrating trust in life are farmers. Farmers, when you think about it, they've got to do a lot of trust! They've got to trust the weather. They've got to trust the process of growth. Think about that! A farmer plants the seed, and waters and cultivates, and then has to trust. And wait for the harvest.

Can you imagine if a farmer planted the seed – just planted it – and then started looking at his watch, thinking, *"Come on! Come on! Grow! Grow!!! Let's get on with it! Move on!"* It's like, *"I want that for dinner! Hurry and grow it!!!"* **[Laughs]**

Doesn't that sound crazy? But, yet, same with our lives: we're trying to rush and grow things. And I'll tell you, being impatient and trying to rush things has us actually miss out on so many of the experiences. And even – and especially – being impatient during crises and challenges. One of the things about patience is: we really need to learn how to wait.

One of my favorite Scriptures is in the Book of Isaiah, and it says this: *"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They will mount up with wings, like eagles; they will walk and not grow weary; they will run, and not grow faint."*

And listen to the wisdom in that! It says when you wait – when you're patient and calm and trusting – the rewards are: you will be renewed. You will renew your strength. *"You will mount up with wings, like eagles"* means that you will be uplifted to a higher awareness, to a higher way of seeing. And that you'll *"walk and not grow weary"* and *"run and not faint"* means that you will have the energy to do what is yours to do. And you will not be weary. You will not get tired. You'll have all the energy that you need.

One of the things I think that's important to understand is: when you are patient, it helps in a couple of ways. It helps you STAY PRESENT to what's going on, and it helps you PAY ATTENTION so we can use our time in the most effective way.

I believe that there is a gift when life suddenly starts going differently than we expect. When life throws us a curve, if we stay present and pay attention, we will see the gifts and the blessings that that situation came in our life to give us.

Many years ago, I heard about this story. It was a turtle; it was a children's book. And this turtle accidentally flipped upside down. And, for turtles – if you know – if you're upside down, they can't get themselves back up. When they're upside down, they can't eat. They can't get water. They might dehydrate. They're even more vulnerable to prey. It is a very dangerous time, and it could be their demise.

So this little turtle flips upside down and, at first, he's freaked out. He's like, "*I'm going to die! Help! Help!*" He's calling for help. And he gets exhausted, and then what he does is: he stays calm and he waits. He stays present and he pays attention. And then he thinks to himself, "*You know; I have never seen the sky like this before. Look how blue! Look how gorgeous the sky is! Hey, and look; there's a cloud.*" And he says, "*You know, I've never seen trees from this angle and perspective before. I've never seen birds flying and singing.*" And, suddenly, he is transformed to new experiences he's never had. He is in awe of some of the beauty of life that he'd never noticed or had the opportunity to see. And, yet, it was dangerous! But it was also an opportunity for him to experience new and different.

Every one of us – like that turtle – has had our lives flipped upside down. And it seems limiting and restricting and sad and bad. But if we can be like that turtle – staying present, staying calm and paying attention – we can see some things that it is inviting us into. Experiences that are new. Ways of seeing and being and interacting in ways that we haven't done before that – if this moment hadn't happened – we may not have gotten those experiences.

You know, right now, being at home, we get to spend a lot of time either alone with ourselves. We can deepen our spirituality and our understanding. We can maybe get more focused and get clarity on a situation in our life that we wanted... that we're concerned about, and have to make a decision about. Being at home, we get to spend time with our loved ones: maybe get to play with the children a little more. Maybe get to spend more time with our spouse and our family members. Maybe to do some more sharing; to be more intimate and nurture that relationship in a way that we may not have had, had this situation not happened.

You know, there are things we can heal, and there are insights we can gain. There's new joys we can discover. There are all kinds of possibilities, depending on how we choose to use this time. And how much attention that we choose... what we pay attention to, and just see what life is trying to show us.

This really is an opportunity for us in so many ways. Maybe at home, it may be a new opportunity to try something new. Maybe try cooking: try some new recipes. Maybe read that book that you've wanted to read. Zig Ziegler used to call it – what'd he call it? – "round to its." He said all those things you say you'll do when you get "round to it." So what's some of your "round to its"? Maybe your "round to it" is to read more. Maybe you have a "round to it" to learn how to speak Spanish. Maybe you have a "round to it" for painting the house or the living room. Maybe it's to fix that leak. Maybe it's to talk and call your mom more often. Maybe it's to write some poetry. Maybe it's to do a jigsaw puzzle... or whatever it is that you want to do. What are your "round to its"?

One of my "round to its" is I started playing the harmonica again: taking harmonica lessons. I'm still as bad as I was before, but I'm out there, and I'm doing it. And it really is kind of fun!

So what is this experience going to bring to you? How do you want to use your time in the best way possible? Not lamenting or complaining, but staying present and paying attention, and being engaged and using it in the greatest way.

To me, when there's patience, you not only stay present and pay attention, but it helps in many ways to eventually give us some perspective: perspective on how we're living our life. Perspective on what's really important to ourselves. Perspective on deepening our relationship with God, with our loved ones and ourselves.

This opportunity that we have can help us go a lot deeper into appreciating life. Appreciating our jobs. Appreciating our homes. And appreciating what a wonderful world we really do live in.

Crisis really is something with danger. And there certainly is! But there is something also about it that gives us an opportunity. And how we handle it – individually and collectively – will determine the outcome of this crisis.

And, so, emotionally we need to handle it by letting ourselves feel our feelings. And we need to handle our mind by calming it down and immersing our mind in the mind of God. And then, finally, using our time to the best by being patient, present and paying attention.

One thing I want you to think about this week is to ask yourself this question: What gift is this crisis trying to give to me? And I hope – for all of our sakes – that we will all take advantage of this opportunity.

God bless you!

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