

## **Devotion – Eleventh Week after Pentecost**

### **Rev. Jeanne Simpson**

Well, now we're in reset mode. We thought we were safe. We took off our masks, started eating out together in restaurants, enjoyed cookie receptions and luncheons after church, and began to move on toward closer contact with each other. And now we're back to masks, and distancing, and retooling how we eat together. I am leaving town this week to go to the first public conference I've attended in 2 years, and I will admit, I'm a little nervous. I've gotten directives from Montreat that we are to wear masks everywhere except when we actually begin to eat our food (at distanced tables) and when we are in our room. I'm fine with that, and I'm looking forward to hearing the speakers and attending workshops related to words of wisdom in the Bible. It will be nice just to be in the presence of preachers I know and admire, to see other Presbyterian women, and to hear thoughts about theology other than my own!

I wonder about all the events that are to restart this fall – the Broadway in Atlanta series, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Spivey Hall concerts, and football games. We used to participate in all those events with little thought of being in a confined concert hall or space with others. Some of us have booked river or ocean cruises, or tours of the U.S. Some of us have bought plane tickets for long awaited visits to family, or getaway vacations overseas. And those plans are all in jeopardy again.

We not only have COVID fatigue, we have emotional fatigue from our inability to freely move around or visit friends and family or just pop into a restaurant for a meal. That makes us physically tired. I'm much less enthusiastic about doing my chores around the house, or cleaning out stuff that needs to go to Goodwill. I have more trouble getting up the energy to tackle tasks that require going through materials and organizing them. So in spite of the fact that I can't go to all the places I used to for entertainment, and I now have more time to do these things, I find myself reading a book instead.

We're actually in a state of prolonged grief. We're mourning the loss of family and friends who have died during this time, and often we could not say goodbye or even be present at their memorial services. These connections are vital to our well-being, and we've suffered from that loss of human contact. And we're mourning the loss of our independence. So how do we get back to feeling joy and hope? I think we have to look at small little things for a change. We have to call or zoom with friends and family and stay in touch as best we can, just thankful that we can reach out. I'm reminded of Carole Masdon's service several weeks ago, when we could cry at her loss, but laugh at the wonderful memories of her, all together. That service was truly a celebration of her life and her eternal rest with God.

Most importantly, we have to remember that God is there for us, always. We can still enjoy good discussion in Sunday School, and choir anthems, and (hopefully) meaningful sermons. The Word of God is still there for us to reassure us, to bring us joy, and to give us hope. Jeremiah 29:11 says this very eloquently:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Romans 8:28 says this:

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

So I am enjoying the things around me that God has provided for us, I am enjoying reading good books, I am enjoying reading the comics and working crossword puzzles and the Suduko in the morning paper, and I'm even working on a jigsaw puzzle for the first time in ages. Jim and I have gotten into a rhythm for cooking simpler meals with fresh produce this summer, and we try to spend some time each evening sitting in the gazebo and just quietly enjoying the shade and light breeze. And every week, on Sunday, we get to reconnect with you at church, and that is a delight. And Mary's gifts of doughnuts and coffee for Sunday School don't hurt!

So, as they say, “find your joy” and embrace it. It may not be from usual sources, but there's plenty out there to lift your spirits. And occasionally just admit to yourself that you feel a little down, and call someone up for a pep talk. Finally, ask God to “order your steps” and guide your day. You are loved and embraced in God's arms, always. And don't worry about cleaning out the closets or the attic or the basement when you don't feel like it. It will still be there, waiting for some renewed energy!

**Jeanne**