

March 22, 2020
The Fourth Sunday in Lent, Year A
The Rev. Keri T. Aubert
St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, New Haven, CT

1 Samuel 16:1-13
Psalm 23
Ephesians 5:8-14
John 9:1-41

Since the last Sunday we were together, so much has happened. It was only two weeks ago, but it seems like forever. It's as if time itself is yielding to an unknown force beyond our comprehension or control. It feels risky even to gaze sidelong toward the future. How long will this last? How much economic mayhem will it cause? Who in my circle of beloveds will fall sick? Will the hospitals be able to care for them?

Such questions lead down a rabbit hole of uncertainty that is way too deep and way too dark. Rather than go there, it might be better to stick with the here and now. But the here and now involves staying home and barricading the doors. Unfortunately, this is just not the same as a good staycation. A good staycation requires only a good book, a jigsaw puzzle, and enough energy to whip up a batch of homemade cookies. If only it was that simple. For some of us, staying home means contending with bored children or lost income. For some of us, staying home brings not renewing solitude but depleting isolation. Perhaps for all of us, there is no barricade effective against the restless fretting of anxiety.

Having heard all that, it will not surprise you to know that last week my emotions were scattered. I would say that they ranged up and down, but the movement was much more complicated than that. Think of high school chemistry and those diagrams of how gas molecules behave in an enclosed container: in constant motion, they bounce randomly against the walls. In this case, the walls consisted of coronavirus news stories. Oh, no, the numbers are rising. Oh, yes, look at that human kindness. Oh, sheesh, what might that yield? It has been nearly impossible to focus. In response, I have let myself decide that focusing is overrated.

Since the last Sunday we were together, the world has changed. I expect it will never be the same again. Since the last Sunday we were together, *we* have changed. I expect that *we* will never be the same again. The sudden repositioning may already have caused our heads to be spinning with vertigo, but there is yet more change ahead.

We didn't sign up for this. We didn't want to learn new terms like "social distancing" or "flatten the curve." We never imagined being asked to stay home for TWO MONTHS. We certainly never dreamed that there might ever be a need for ventilator rationing. We did NOT sign up for *this*.

Life brings us so many things that we didn't sign up for. But they're not all bad. For example, this week, the daffodils suddenly exploded. It seemed as if one day there were no daffodil flowers, and the next day they were everywhere. As the week progressed, blooms of various sorts popped out everywhere. I found it oddly disconcerting. No matter that the blooming was right on time; Thursday was, after all, the first day of spring. But with all the awful news and terrible uncertainty, it seemed somehow wrong. I thought to myself that spring needed to go away and come back at a more appropriate time.

Apparently I wasn't ready for spring, but spring was ready for me. Yesterday Jakki brought in one daffodil and one hyacinth and put them in a small vase next to the stove. I noticed them only after I saw a photo that Jakki posted on Facebook, and then I forgot all about them. But I went into the kitchen last night and reached into the refrigerator—and suddenly I smelled that hyacinth. It was practically demanding to be noticed. That pushy flower was a mercy. Spring has arrived, here and now. More essentially, God is here, now.

We did not sign up for this, but we will figure it out. I really do believe that, and not just because my job is to share not the bad news, but rather the Good News. The thing is, at heart, the Good News is all the same all the time: God is here, now. We hear it in the stories we tell every week about God's work in the world. Our people have been telling those stories for a very long time. In a world that is ever roaming, those stories stay true. With those stories, we remember that our loving God created and saved. It is through remembering that we come to *know* that our loving God will *continue* to create and to save.

Wherever you are, I hope you will keep remembering. I hope you will be gentle with yourself. I hope you will reach out for support when you need it. It may be Lent, but, as Christians, we are always looking to the resurrection. To put it another way, together, we are Easter people. Like those daffodils, like those hyacinths and crocuses and tulips, we will rise to the occasion. Our loving God is creative and saving, around us and within us.