

## **Easter Letter (2020)**

**To: The Mount Royal United Church faith community**

**From: The Rev. Scott Stuart**

**“I fell in love with her when we were together, then fell deeper in love with her in the years we were apart.” – Nicholas Sparks.**

Well I sincerely hope that we are not going to be apart for years, but the sentiment is the same. When I came to this pastoral charge back in January what I found was a community who welcomed me and my family and seemed to love one another as a family genuinely would. I've not only enjoyed worship with you all, I have been looking forward to it as one week moved into another and I've deeply enjoyed getting to know some of you better as I made my way around in home and hospital visitation. As time went on I continued to hear the phrase “we've won the lottery” as folks discussed my call to Mount Royal United but, in truth, I feel the same way which is why I'm so certain that God has called us together to be church in our world.

Now that our world has changed so dramatically in just a matter of weeks we find ourselves disconnected, apart, isolated and lonely; and yes, your minister feels this separation just as you do, and it's disquieting to my own soul as I imagine it is with many of you. We are social creatures designed emotionally and mentally for close community and here we are finding ourselves focused on finding community in alternative ways and keeping our distance from family and close friends. Over this time, it has been my privilege to find some different ways of creating worship. With help from Bill (our Systems Committee Chair) we have put together services and messages that I hope you have found meaningful in one way or another; I've been offering a mid-week meditation through our website to give folks a short break from the anxiety that is currently traveling through our lives and society and, as we continue this isolation, I am looking into new ways that we might come together (perhaps an online coffee and conversation?) Please stay tuned for those offerings.

However, within the midst of this anxiety, this disquieting, this disruption to our lives and our very natures what does the Easter story have to offer? What words of comfort or compassion or solace can we find there? To answer that I

point us to John 24. In this chapter, the disciples have seen the risen Christ and their hope has been restored but Thomas (who was called the twin) was not with the disciples when Christ first appeared and so, for Thomas, his life is still in darkness even after the resurrection. His life is without hope, direction or purpose and despair is his reality. So strong is this despair and isolation that he refuses to believe in the risen Christ until he puts his fingers and hands into the wounds of Jesus. Now at the very beginning of Lent I asked us all to imagine ourselves into the Lenten story; to imagine ourselves as the people in that story. Well have you ever wondered who Thomas was the twin of? Thomas is the twin of us, the reader. We are quite literally written into the text and asked to imagine ourselves as that one last disciple; still heartbroken, isolated and in the midst of despair because, even in that deep place of brokenness, the light of Christ comes assuring Thomas that he is not alone and will NEVER be again.

My friends here we are today isolated, within an age where terms like “social-distance” and “flattening the curve” are standard and everyday. Not in my lifetime have I seen such isolation imposed on us by the government for the good of all; but know that even in this darkness, even in this soul-wrenching condition, we are still God’s children. We may all be walking a longer Lenten path than we had first imagined or wanted but our Easter shall come, just as it did for Thomas. In the meantime, as I continue to watch our community of faith reach out in new and innovative ways, I believe that when this is all over we will be stronger for it, bound together in this common experience that has led us into a true living out of the wilderness of Lent and into the new life of Easter.

In the meantime, may the light of Christ be within you, around you, sustain you and comfort you this day and each day until we find ourselves together once again.

Your brother in Christ,

The Rev. Scott Stuart