

We'll Sing On

From my understanding, one usually starts a sermon by asking the congregation to please be seated. Well, considering you're all watching the service from your homes, you're probably already seated, so I guess I can skip that part.

“It is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly.” (1 Peter 2:19-25) When Peter wrote this, he meant that suffering without reason is a character building experience. Just because we endure pain does not mean we have the right to bestow pain onto others. We must take what we felt during our suffering and turn it into something positive. In our case, we must stare COVID-19 in the face and find a way to choose happiness over fear. Fortunately, this is exactly what most people are doing.

It never ceases to baffle me how disaster never fails to bring absolutely everyone together. It's sad that that's what it takes to bring out the best in humanity, however, it proves Peter's point that suffering for no reason can end up being a credit.

One very scientific example lies within nature. Because so many people around the world are sheltering in place, the Earth has been given the opportunity to heal. With more factories closed and less people traveling by car, air pollution has decreased, allowing the skies to become more vibrant. In Northern India, the Himalayas, that were once invisible due to smog, can now be clearly seen and appreciated for their magnificence. Wild animals have more room to go about their daily business. Birds, specifically, seem to be coming out of hiding more. In places where there is larger local wildlife, such as China and Vietnam, bans on wildlife trade have been put in place to reduce extinction.

In the material world, some celebrities have taken to using YouTube to produce the homemade version of their talk shows, or

creating their own news channels entirely devoted to good news. John Krasinski, who played Jim on *The Office*, has taken his news channel, *Some Good News (SGN)*, to the next level. His stories revolve mostly around very mundane people doing extraordinary acts of kindness for their medical professionals, neighbors, family members, or friends. Krasinski will then have new guests every show, whether it be one of his celebrity friends, the original cast of *Hamilton*, or a civilian whose story touched him. A few weeks ago, Krasinski took his show live and hosted a virtual prom for the class of 2020. He put in a lot of effort to make sure this year's seniors had an epic prom, surprising viewers with appearances from Rainn Wilson and Chance the Rapper, and live performances from the Jonas Brothers, Billie Eilish, and Finneas O'Connell.

For All Saints, coming to digital church on Sundays is how we're choosing to spread our love. "For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls." (1 Peter 2:19-25) And in a way, we were going astray. I'm positive none of us knew what to do when this horrible virus took over our lives, but like sheep returning to their shepherd, we all continue to come back together as a congregation to celebrate this Easter season. It's amazing how we're still able to accomplish weekly worship like this. Although it's over video and we're not physically together, it still feels like we're coming together as a congregation. It feels like we're not alone.

On a more local level, my neighborhood in Smyrna has been trying it's best to come together as a community. My neighbors and I have taken to putting different items in our windows for children to scavenge for when they go on walks. First, it was bears, then paper eggs for Easter. As my mom and I walk about our part of the neighborhood, I always see signs calling out support to the city and it's first responders sitting in many different lawns. Kids have taken to chalk drawings,

expressing their appreciation for their neighborhood and the people who live in it.

My school, Pebblebrook High School, has been doing a great job coping with digital learning. All of my teachers have been super supportive and understanding, especially to the seniors. Every week in the place of our fifth period, students have been signing up to perform by way of Instagram lives. These performances have been a great way to provide entertainment while getting the chance to check in on our classmates. Additionally, every Friday, there is a new special guest that joins us to talk on Zoom. These guests vary from Pebblebrook alumni, to working professionals in the performing arts, to anyone who might be able to help us learn something new. Last week's guest was Mr. Bill Crawford PhD. Mr. Bill spent the whole day teaching us about mental health and how to cope with stress and anxiety. His wisdom was very helpful considering our current situation.

Personally, my mom and I have been coping by going on daily walks. We find the air refreshing and always feel better after getting a bit of exercise. Going on these walks is what's made me recognize the amount of birds coming out of hiding. I have enjoyed pointing out different birds to my mom as we walk. We've even started to keep track of what birds we've seen in a big nature book, tabbing the pages of each species of bird. So far, my favorites have been the Eastern BlueBird and Red Headed Woodpecker. It is in these birds that I'm able to see little glimpses of God. Seeing them happily flying around lifts my spirits that I will be able to fly free again soon too.

All of these amazingly wonderful things inspire me to keep hoping for a better future. They remind me of a hymn; What Wondrous Love Is This. I'm specifically reminded of the last verse, "And when from death I'm free I'll sing on." When you're feeling hopeless, you have to keep singing. Though singing may not directly fix the problem, it will keep

our hope alive. This is one of the many important lessons Mrs. Kimmell has taught me in choir, and I feel it is a perfect companion to what Peter has been trying to teach us. Even though we are suffering from this epidemic without reason, we have to keep singing on. In the end, we'll all become better people for it.

Though none of us may know what lies ahead, all we can do is keep singing and hope for the best. Discovering different ways to spread our love, whether through chalk drawings, Zoom proms, or belting it out over Instagram live, will help us be credits to our neighbors, God, and, most importantly, ourselves. That being said, I would like to challenge all of you to find a new way to spread your love around, even if it's as simple as giving someone you love an air hug. We will all persevere to the metaphorical light at the end of the Coronavirus if we find ways to persevere together. As Zack says, "Alleluia anyhow", and as I have now learned to say, "Let's sing on".