

## "Does this look like Love Your Neighbor?"

A deacon colleague of mine had posted on Facebook a meme of Presiding Bishop Curry, with a message pertaining to voting this November. As I have mentioned before, voter participation is important to the Presiding Bishop and in this meme he gave his suggestion as to what one should consider when casting your vote. After all consideration one should ask the final question "Does this look like love your neighbor?"

It is, after all, what we expect from our PB, who has spent a great deal of time and effort helping all of us enter into the Way of Jesus, or in other words, the Way of Love. And so, because I am an Episcopal Deacon and I liked the meme and its message, I shared it. One of my sister's friends responded to the post with a rather heartfelt plea that began with the words "This is what I have a problem with. People who say things like this and then do very unchristian things." She went on, but you get the basic idea. And, for not the first time on that day, I wished that I could just see her face to face and listen to her. Her confusion and upset are real, and to be honest I find myself scratching my head and wondering where Jesus is in some of the behaviors and messaging I have encountered as of late. And all of that got me to thinking just what love might or should or even does look like in the landscape of COVID-19.

So, let's start with the basics. On our weekly Zoom gathering "Leading Beyond the Blizzard," our bishop mentioned that the House of Bishops had a Zoom conference with Dr. Fauci, and he had informed them that the following three things were basic and necessary to bringing the virus under control.

- \* Wear a mask even outside
- \* Keep socially distant (6 feet apart, or, as the signs in Chuck and Don's pet supply reads, "you must keep 3 and a ¼ wiener dogs apart!")
- \* Move with caution

Wearing a mask isn't always comfortable, and in the outside in the summer here in Minnesota, it can be even a little too warm. But science and data tell us that the simple act of wearing a mask helps you to protect your neighbor. We don't always realize that we have contracted the virus, either it is too early in the disease to manifest itself, or worse, we have fallen into the 40% that are asymptomatic, and while wearing the mask may or may not protect *us* from the virus, it does protect us from infecting others. And here is a bonus, there are some very stylish masks to be had out there as well. So truly wearing a mask does indeed look like love.

The same goes for keeping socially distant. I know that it is hard to maintain that 6-foot distance, but again science and data tell us that if we are that far apart, we decrease the chances of encountering or spreading those little droplets that contain the virus. Again, this one is looking like love as well.

The third is a bit more of a challenge, but by encouraging us to move with caution, we are being encouraged to be patient in our endeavor to get back to normal. This is the most difficult I think to wrap our selves around. Staying apart, not gathering and interacting the way we are used to doing seems, well it seems wrong. It was hard last week when I saw a Mom of two of my former speech students in a parking lot, not to hug her. We both caught ourselves up short, threw open our arms, and yelled “air hug,” but it really wasn’t the same.

We want things the way they are supposed to be. Kids should be in school, restaurants should be open indoors, we shouldn’t worry about how crowded the Mill City Farmers’ Market is, or if the house is roomy enough for the family to gather for the grandson’s third birthday; we should go back to church as normal, and continue coffee hours and choir practice and community dinners. But, just as the wearing of masks and keeping socially distant look like love, moving with caution is probably the greatest gesture of love we can make for each other. None of these acts should in any way be considered as political. They should all be seen for what they truly are, following the way of Jesus, the way of love.

Look, I understand, I want things back the way they used to be before we had to worry about viruses and pandemics and masks and the list goes on. I want to visit with my grandchildren and hug them, bake cookies with them and cuddle and read books. I want the freedom of movement, I want the normalcy of church. I want these things a great deal and I will admit there are times when I am truly depressed by the situation in which we find ourselves. Prayer helps in those times, and reading. But when all is said and done, we need to ask that all important question our Presiding Bishop is always suggesting that we ask. “Does what I am doing look like love your neighbor?” If the answer is yes, then we are walking the way of Jesus, we are not alone, and we will be fine.

*Blessings, Deacon Janet*