

## **Holding on to the Present**

*Rise & Shine, April 26<sup>th</sup>*

### **James 4:13-15**

*Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money." Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that."*

### **Questions:**

1. Do you believe God wants you to learn something specific from this pandemic?
  2. What is the best part of forced time at home? What is the worst part?
  3. Which practices and habits from your pre-coronavirus life are helping you now? Which ones are hindering you?
  4. What is a life-lesson that you've learned during the pandemic that you will carry with you once the pandemic ends?
- 

*In the News*

### **The View from Pandemic Lockdown: Stuck in an 'Everlasting Present'**

Timothy Merrill has been pastor of a church of English-speaking expats in Shanghai, China, for the last several years. His wife Jeanie has been teaching at an English-speaking school there. They'd been planning to conclude their work in China this coming June. In late January, having a couple of weeks off and taking only minimal luggage with them, they flew to the United States to visit family members.

But with the unanticipated travel restrictions imposed by China in its efforts to control the spread of the coronavirus, returning there to finish out their time is now on hold. And they have an apartment of furniture in Shanghai that needs to be packed up and shipped by June 30.

The Merrills' predicament is but one of perhaps millions of stories worldwide about people who have been stranded away from home because of the pandemic, or had their lives otherwise interrupted.

A few days ago, Scaachi Koul, a *BuzzFeed* news reporter, wrote about her parents who were visiting family in India when international travel was shut down. In India, Koul's mother has been unable to get one of her prescribed drugs, "the same one everyone's been taking because they think it helps cure Covid-19," Koul says.

"Everything with my parents feels so precarious," says Koul, "like their lives are little wires that could get snipped at any minute. I wouldn't even see it coming. I wouldn't even be able to get to them in time to see it happen."

Beyond international travel restrictions, lockdowns in the United States mean that some adults aren't able to see their newborn grandchildren, weddings have been postponed, the deceased are being buried without mourners present, plans of all sorts are in limbo, visits to our loved ones in nursing homes are forbidden, eagerly anticipated events have been cancelled, personal plans are in jeopardy, and people who'd had good jobs are suddenly filing for unemployment. And this includes people who, as far as they know, don't have the disease.

Obviously, the lives of those who have contacted Covid-19 are much more upset, and some are not surviving it.

In a recent article, Matt Simon, a science writer at *Wired* magazine, referred to a woman who'd said of the current crisis, "It's like there's no future." Simon then explained, "What she meant was we can't plan for the future, because in the age of the coronavirus, we don't know what we'll be doing in six months, or even tomorrow. *We're stuck in a new kind of everlasting present.*"

While many people are distressed by this "everlasting present," Merrill, who's still awaiting a change in travel rules to enable a return to Shanghai to close out things there, is philosophical about their circumstances. He quotes the popular saying, "If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans." Merrill also says, "Perhaps we should start adding the initials D.V. after all our statements of future plans. Latin for *Deo volente*: "God willing."

---

**Luke 12:19-21**

*"And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.*

**Matthew 6:25-26, 33-34**

*Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ... But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.*

---

**Prayer for Quiet Confidence (BCP p. 832)**

O God of peace, *who has* taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength: By the might of *your* Spirit lift us, we pray *you*, to *your* presence, where we may be still and know that *you* are God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.