

## Our Journey Alone... Together

*Rise & Shine, May 3<sup>rd</sup>*

### **Footprints in the Sand (author unknown)**

*One night I dreamed a dream.*

*As I was walking along the beach with my Lord.*

*Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life.*

*For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,*

*One belonging to me and one to my Lord.*

*After the last scene of my life flashed before me,*

*I looked back at the footprints in the sand.*

*I noticed that at many times along the path of my life,*

*especially at the very lowest and saddest times,*

*there was only one set of footprints.*

*This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it.*

*"Lord, you said once I decided to follow you,*

*You'd walk with me all the way.*

*But I noticed that during the saddest and most troublesome times of my life,*

*there was only one set of footprints.*

*I don't understand why, when I needed You the most, You would leave me."*

*He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will never leave you*

*Never, ever, during your trials and testings.*

*When you saw only one set of footprints,*

*It was then that I carried you."*

### **Questions:**

1. What new methods of support and pastoral care have you found most helpful during the pandemic?
  2. What old methods of support and pastoral care have you re-introduced to your life that have helped you get through this time?
  3. If you were to die tomorrow, with no chance to communicate with anyone, what would you most regret not having said, and to whom? What prevents you from communicating that now?
  4. Is it important to you to have people by your side when you die?
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## **Pastoral Care Providers Struggle to Shepherd Hurting People from a Distance**

Kaytlin Butler, 26, is on track to be ordained as a Presbyterian minister later this year. Currently in a chaplaincy residency at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York, she and other chaplains have had to get creative about how to minister to Covid-19 patients and their families when they are not allowed any physical contact. The hospital has had more than 600 patients with the coronavirus. Butler wants "to accompany people who did not want or expect to be where they are, and to comfort their loved ones." She sees her primary task as that of sitting with people in their pain, listening to the fears, hopes or desires that patients, caregivers, medical staff or family members want to express as they deal with trauma and uncertainty. Sometimes they are searching for meaning, forgiveness, assurance that they are not alone, a reminder that they are loved, or just to know that someone hears them when they cry.

David Fleenor, an Episcopal priest who directs the hospital's pastoral care program, tells chaplaincy trainees to "pay deep attention, and listen, and let people know that they have been heard by you, and, in some mystical way, have been heard by God." But in the days of increased social distancing, being physically present with those in need to listen to their pain is increasingly complicated, if not impossible.

Rev. Delonte Gholston of Peace Fellowship in Washington, D.C., posted this on social media recently: "It's hard on the soul to not be able to embrace the people you're shepherding. ... It's hard not to walk in the community and ... let [brothers and sisters] know you are there ... and just let them know you care. ... It's hard to pastor your people from behind closed doors."

Gholston added, "And yes, I know God is with us. Yes, I know that Jesus meets us behind our closed doors and breathes the Spirit upon us. Yes, I know that God meets us in the midst of the pain of it all. And yes I see God moving in new and unexpected ways that I could have never imagined prior to Covid. But today, I don't want to put an ounce of spiritual spin on this stark reality. I just need to plainly say it. Pastoring during a pandemic is just plain hard."

So chaplains and other ministers are turning to old-school methods of communication, such as making phone calls, burning CDs or DVDs with photos, music or a worship service or spiritual message; or sending texts, emails, snail mail cards and letters, as well as newer technologies such as social media, live streaming, blogs, podcasts, or online group meetings or chats. They are also finding new meaning to spiritual practices such as intercession. Butler sometimes prays outside a patient's door. Others offer prayers from home.

When communicating to the people about God becomes difficult, spiritual caregivers can still communicate to God about the people, bringing their heartbreaking concerns before God. "Carry the lambs you cannot see in person to the throne room of grace. Carry them in your heart," wrote Jared C. Wilson, author and director of content strategy for Midwestern Seminary.

Recently, a nurse asked if she was going to hell because her patient had died of Covid-19. Would God hold her responsible? Hearing that, Butler's heart broke. She urged the nurse not to blame herself for a crisis that was beyond her control, assuring her that she had done all in her power to save her patient. "I and your team will know that for you, until you are ready to know it yourself," Butler said.

Another nurse wondered where God was in all this. Butler replied that God was in the love people show others, in the people risking their own health and safety as they try to save lives. That God was right here, crying with us.

"It's one thing to say that love always triumphs over death," Butler said. "Some years that you're saying it, you're not living it. This ... is one of those years that you kind of need other people to believe it with you."

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### **Genesis 31:48-49**

*Laban said, "This heap [of stones] is a witness between you and me today." Therefore he called it Galeed, and the pillar Mizpah, for he said, "The LORD watch between you and me, when we are absent one from the other."*

### **2 Corinthians 1:3-5**

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which*

*we ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ.*

**Prayer for a Pandemic**

May we who are merely inconvenienced

Remember those whose lives are at stake.

May we who have no risk factors

Remember those most vulnerable.

May we who have the luxury of working from home

Remember those who must choose between preserving their health or making rent.

May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their schools close

Remember those who have no options.

May we who have to cancel our trips

Remember those that have no place to go.

May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult of the economic market

Remember those who have no margin at all.

May we who settle in for a quarantine at home

Remember those who have no home.

During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other,

Let us yet find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbors.

Amen.