

## INTERIM MODERATOR'S LETTER

### Keeping Faith

"Keep calm and carry on." Suddenly, this motivational meme has met its match: COVID-19. It won't let us carry on as before. Though outwardly composed, many of us feel inwardly like Edvard Munch's "The Scream". What's worse, the screamer is touching his face.

What are we to do when loving your neighbour means keeping your distance?

The ancient Desert Fathers can teach us about that. They invented "social distancing." They left their cities and towns to be hermits in the wilderness, to explore the universe within themselves. They contemplated the scriptures. They prayed. They kept still in God's presence until, like a murky glass of pond water, the silt in their souls settled, leaving their inner vision – their *insight* – crystal clear.

Henry David Thoreau tried a similar experiment when he retreated to Walden's Pond. "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately," he wrote. He wanted to learn what his life had teach him, "and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."

Though the Desert Fathers were physically isolated, they kept in touch with each other. Disciples came to them, soliciting their wisdom. Those disciples collected their teachings and passed them on. Thoreau, too, chronicled his experiment in social distancing in his famous book, *Walden: or, Life in the Woods*. Perhaps this time of social distancing is our chance to look within, "to be still and know that I am God", as Psalm 46 says.

The tools the Church usually employs – public worship, holy communion, social gathering and teaching – are not at our disposal right now. But we can, collectively, look within ourselves, contemplate the scriptures, pray and be still, and listen for God's still, small voice. Perhaps we'll acquire insight into the vast universe within each one of us. Maybe we'll be given a clearer vision of God's holy love for all things. Then we can reach out with the tools we *do* have at our disposal. By phone, email, and cards posted the old-fashioned way, we can share what we see and feel within, and hear each other's worry and loneliness with compassion. Isn't this how love, joy, and peace 'go viral'?

New St James is a strong community of faith. COVID-19 won't change that. We will care for each other through this disruption. We'll keep the faith and carry on.

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