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FAITHFUL DISORIENTATION AND REORIENTATION

A global crisis is both disorienting and reorienting. Change and loss are disorienting. The things we expected and took for granted have changed, and the changes of recent weeks have been abrupt, sweeping, and difficult.

Disorientation can lead to reorientation, in which our priorities and ways of understanding the world will change, and we will face a future in which much has been lost, and some other things have been found. I sense that it is too early to have a good understanding of our reorientation, but I can already see it beginning.

There are some ideas that do not fare well in a global crisis. For instance: the idea of individual independence. The idea of making one's own way in the world, independent and self-reliant, is even more difficult to sustain today. Our lives are inter-dependent. It is clear that the action (or in-action) of countless other people affects me, just as I affect them.

Another idea that does not survive is any religion that promises prosperity and health as rewards for faith. This illusion is difficult to maintain in stable times, and it falls apart in crisis.

In this crisis, I am leaning on the faithful people of generations past. Our Christian ancestors have proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus in times of war and peace, in times of plenty and in times of plague.

The Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann analyzed the book of Psalms and found a pattern of prayers of disorientation and reorientation. A line from Psalm 22, prayed by Jesus on the cross, may be the most familiar of the disorienting psalms: "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" In the book of Psalms, prayers of disorientation—danger, loss, and sorrow—keep company with prayers of reorientation, in which our ancestors gave up the illusion of invulnerability, showed gratitude for community, and found a deeper trust in the steadfast love of God.

Peace,

Rev. Dr. Matthew Wooster
Senior Minister