

THE TAU CROSS

Keeping Faith During A Pandemic

“Twenty-nine.” That number, forming a one-word sentence, is the way that Sarah Zhang, a staff writer for *The Atlantic*, begins her article about scientists trying to neutralize the coronavirus. Zhang informs us that twenty-nine is “the number of proteins the new coronavirus has, at most, in its arsenal to attack human cells....Twenty-nine proteins that have taken over enough cells in enough bodies to kill more than 80,000 people (at the time of writing) and grind the world to a halt.” She goes on to say that, “If there is a way—a vaccine, therapy, or drug—to stop the coronavirus, it will be by blocking these proteins from hijacking, suppressing, and evading humans’ cellular machinery. The coronavirus may sound small and simple with its mere 29 proteins, but that is also what makes it hard to fight. It has so few weak spots to exploit.”



While together we work to change our social behaviors in an effort to slow the transmission of the coronavirus, it is comforting to know that modern science is devoting

considerable knowledge and resources to combatting Covid-19. Even with great scientists working overtime to find solutions, their work is likely to feel agonizingly slow, and we will become impatient.

We will do well to remember that people’s comprehension of the causes of infection and transmission of disease is light years ahead of our understanding even 100 years ago. Go back further in time and the human plight was downright dismal. The lack of awareness about basic biology allowed diseases to run rampant through populations.

Most of us cannot imagine the horror of 14th century Europe, where in the span of just a few years over 50 million people died of the bubonic plague. We know that ignorance contributed greatly to the magnitude of suffering, and the Church of that time did not acquit itself well. For starters, the prevailing Christian opinion was that devastation caused by the plague was a measure of God’s wrath because of human sin. A common solution proposed by church leaders was to hold

enormous public processions around either the church or the town and encourage gathering to receive the sacraments. As one can imagine, the increased human contact only helped to spread the disease. Another ugly occurrence during that dark time was the blaming of marginalized communities, especially Jews, for causing the plague.

For all of our modern knowledge, the coronavirus is uniquely pernicious. Because people can be contagious even if they are asymptomatic or for up to two weeks before symptoms develop, our confidence that we can safely gather even in small numbers is undermined. Gathering for church will be especially problematic. Our worship takes place in a confined space that puts people in close

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proximity for an hour or more. When we include the fact that singing is an activity that magnifies the dispersal distance and volume of the tiny droplets that can carry viral material, we have a real difficulty in providing a safe environment.

Erin S. Bromage, Ph.D., who teaches immunology and infectious disease at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, has written a thorough article that synthesizes much of the current research as to how the Covid-19 virus spreads under different conditions (<https://www.erinbromage.com/post/the-risks-know-them-avoid-them>). The research makes for sobering reading and argues against our returning to church, at least in our traditional pattern, anytime soon. I have been thinking for awhile that when restrictions begin to ease up, our safest option for initial worship gatherings might be outdoor services on our front lawn. We would have much more room for maintaining safe distances. Families would be able to gather as a single unit and each household could bring their own bread and wine to use in the celebration of the Eucharist. I do not see us contemplating an in-person public service until late summer, perhaps the end of July or August.

For most of us this experience of forced hibernation has been a challenge. For some it has meant the loss of work, while for others it has created significant logistical problems including the complication of medical treatments. Everyone has been affected in ways great and small. I give thanks for the many ways that people have ventured to stay connected with one another. We will continue to offer virtual services and look for other means of providing a sense of community. I look forward to that day down the road when we will be able to safely gather together in our beautiful sanctuary, singing hymns and giving thanks together.

I close with a prayer by John O'Donohue from his book *To Bless The Space Between Us*. It has the power to speak to us during these times of isolation.

For Solitude

May you recognize in your life the presence, power and life of your soul.

May you realize that you are never alone, that your soul in its brightness and belonging connects you intimately with the rhythm of the universe.

May you have respect for your individuality and difference.

May you realize that the shape of your soul is unique, that you have a special destiny here, that behind the facade of your life there is something beautiful and eternal happening.

May you learn to see your self with the same delight, pride and expectation with which God sees you in every moment.

Blessings,
Fr. Eric+

A Garden and the Jungle

Nature does not need our help to grow. My backyard has been overgrown with weeds for years: crabgrass, periwinkle, clover, thistle, dandelions, speedwell and a mean rosemary that has been trying to choke out an apple tree. I never had time to work on it, because life happens, and I was intimidated by the dense vegetation that took over my once peaceful garden. A biologist once told me, "When there's a void, nature will cover it." Organic things grow in wild abundance. It felt like a jungle back there. When the shelter-in-place order came in March, my children and I started working in the backyard with the intention of creating a garden for family and friends to play and find peace.

In Hebrew, the term for *paradise* or *heaven* is *Gan Eden*, meaning the Garden of Eden or God's Garden. I can't imagine Adam and Eve frolicking in my backyard, but it is a place where I seek the presence of God. Gardens symbolize a creative consciousness, a thoughtful space to meet the divine. Jungles symbolize a place in which we can easily get lost, overwhelmed, and eaten. Life happens in the tension between order and chaos, much like finding God in a garden and a jungle.

During our sheltering in place, I discovered our Day School security team, Martin and Justin, working security at the parking lot of the hardware store near my home. They are happy to be employed, but they miss St. Matthew's. Life is different. Martin and Justin have seen racism directed towards Asian Americans, customers

frustrated by their loss of freedom, and people generally behaving badly toward one another. Standing in the tension between a chaotic unraveling though fear, anger, and anxiety and the order of civility, patience, and good will, both gentlemen concurred, "It's like a jungle out here." How ironic that so many customers, including myself, have been working on our gardens.

I remember the lyrics from the electrofunk band Twilight 22 and their 1984 breakdance hit *Electric Kingdom*:

*Back in the jungle, a man is free
Free from the street, from captivity
Breakout, breakin. It doesn't matter where you've been
Snake pit, lion's den. You need someone to be your friend.*

Freedom sounds like such a paradox. Our people value freedom so intensely that its perceived loss can hold us captive to fear. And when we do have

it, the creative chaos may be too intense for our wellbeing. In the jungle we can easily forget who we are. Just know, our "garden" is not limited to the green growing things outdoors. It can very much be that symbolic place we create at home to intentionally meet God. The gardens we create in

the places we call home can offer us a life-giving space for rest and rejuvenation, for reconnection and relationship. My kids and I finished our garden in April, and now it is an open space for sharing food, faith, and fun. But the weeds just keep on growing. Nature is like that. With so much beyond our control, the wholeness of mind, body, and spirit finds roots in the relationships



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we share with God; with our family, friends, and neighbors; and, with all creation. We certainly live in the tension between chaos and order. Perhaps this is the best time to pull out the weeds.

Stay healthy, keep the faith, live into love... and God Bless
You!

-Fr. Jay+

Finding God’s Presence



I have had a lot more time to reflect while sheltering in place over the past two months. Recently, I’ve been pondering the notion of what gives us faith in God’s presence in our lives, when we can’t come

The neighborhood children also created this sign post thanking the various people who are supporting all of us during this pandemic.

Children have a way of saying things that are to the point and from their hearts.

I believe that is also how God speaks to each one of us as well. God’s voice is ever-present in the Psalms, which are written in clear, concise language and speak directly from God’s heart to our hearts. I would like to share a portion of Psalm 51 that our parishioner, Phil Carter, identifies with from his childhood:

together in worship each Sunday to renew our faith as a community united in our love of God. Where do we find and see the presence of God in our lives, when our routines and ways of worshipping are so very different than they were just a few short months ago?

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence
and take not your holy spirit from me.
Give me joy of your saving help again
And sustain me with your bountiful spirit.

Psalm 51:11-13

I can see God’s presence in the random acts of kindness that I have witnessed. I see it in the over one hundred painted rocks found in my neighborhood as I walk Juno, my dog. The brightly painted rocks offer hope and encouragement at this time when we need it most. The words painted on the rocks are simple and uplifting, such as “love,” “smile,” “believe,” and “be kind to one another.”

I pray that you may find God’s presence in the simple things right now: the wave from a neighbor whom you don’t know well; the words and laughter of children; in God’s words; and, in God’s unconditional, supportive love for each of you, at this time and for ever more.

Peace and love,
Deacon Lauren

Altar Guild and League for Service Officer Installation

On February 23, Fr. Eric performed the annual ceremony installing the League for Service and Altar Guild officers. The parish extends its profound thanks to these faithful parishioners for their leadership and dedication to serving St. Matthew's.

Photos by Darlia Clerico



Congratulations, Graduates!



St. Matthew's Episcopal Day School is pleased to announce the graduation of its 8th grade students on the morning of May 28th. The ceremony will take place via videoconference.

The St. Matthew's community also sends heartiest congratulations to all who are graduating this season, whether from elementary school, middle school, high school, trade school, college, or beyond!

Send Us Your Graduation Photos!

If you or a family member graduated this season, please send us a photo for inclusion in next month's Tau Cross! Please include the graduate's school and major (if applicable). Photos may be submitted to Beth von Emster at beth.vonemster@gmail.com.

Prayers of the People

During the Prayers of the People portion of the Sunday Service, we ask for God's redemptive presence in the church, the world, our community, and individual lives. If you would like to add a name to be read during the Prayers of the People at an upcoming Sunday Service, please email the church office at office@episcopalstmatthew.org.

Uplifting Moments In The Midst of Crisis

In these difficult times, our people are creating and seeing signs of hope and encouragement all over our community.



An outdoor pop-up art gallery in Belmont



Fr. Jay's daughter Kieran's rainbow outside their home



Fry children draw words of joy on sidewalks



Honoring health care workers in Belmont



Sign posted at the Regent across the street from the church, by families to honor their loved ones' caregivers on Mother's Day

Watch the Sunday Service Livestream



Facebook Videos Live webpage: <https://www.facebook.com/episcopalstmatthew/live/>

No Facebook account is required to watch the livestream with the URL above and it is also a good archive of all of our past livestreamed videos.

Watch on your TV: Download the Facebook Watch TV App, available on many streaming devices (Apple TV, Android TV, Amazon Fire TV, for example) and search the church's name.

Need Continues For Second Harvest Food Bank



As the COVID-19 crisis continues, the Food Bank is seeing substantial increases in need as community members are furloughed, losing hourly wages, and forced to deplete savings while still providing for their families. If you are able to provide financial support, donations can be made online here: <https://give.shfb.org/donatenow>.

Contributions and Pledges to St. Matthew's

Your generous support helps St. Matthew fulfill its mission: to live God's love, to share the Gospel, and to grow spiritually. Thank you for continuing your giving during these times. Contributions and pledges can be mailed to the church or made online at <https://episcopalstmatthew.org/giving/donate-now/>.

You Shop, Amazon Gives amazonSmile

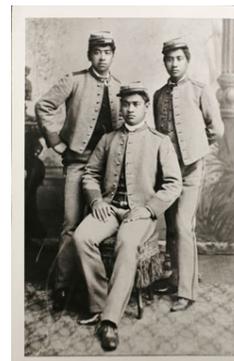
If you haven't already, please consider designating St. Matthew's as the beneficiary of your Amazon orders. Amazon donates 0.5% of the price of your eligible AmazonSmile purchases to the charitable organization of your choice. AmazonSmile is the same Amazon you are familiar with--the same products, prices, and service. To learn more, go to [AboutAmazonSmile](#).

St. Matthew's History Online

Did you know that the parish's first school was called St. Matthew's Military School? Or that our organ is dedicated to one of California's notable native sons? Or our parish's connection with surfing?

You can find all the answers on the website!

<https://episcopalstmatthew.org/history/>



The Episcopal Church of St. Matthew is
a family called by Christ . . .

to Live God's Love,
to Share the Gospel,
to Grow Spiritually.

Come Celebrate with Us!

Sunday Service on Facebook Livestream at
10:00 am

The Rev. Dr. Eric Kimball Hinds, Rector
The Rev. Jay Sapaen Watan, Associate Rector
The Rev. Lauren P. McCombs, Deacon
The Rev. Amber Stancliffe Evans, School Chaplain

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The Tau Cross is the monthly newsletter of the Episcopal Church of St. Matthew. We welcome submissions that have a connection to the parish. Inclusion is at the discretion of the staff and may be edited for space or clarity. The deadline for articles is the 15th of the month and may be sent by email to Beth von Emster at beth.vonemster@gmail.com. Entries should follow these guidelines: Include title of event or article; 200 word maximum description including when, where, cost and contact information as applicable. Avoid abbreviations and other "insider" lingo. Further guidelines and tips available upon request.

Upcoming Events

Mondays - Fridays Morning Prayer
9:30 am

Sundays Sunday Service
10:00 am

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