

Hello Everyone.

I hope this email finds you hunkering down safely within your home and healthy. We are in an unprecedented time of great uncertainty (at least in my lifetime). These are not the days that we would choose—a pandemic virus on the loose, schools closing, church closings, businesses shuttering, plans and appointments canceled—but this is the reality of right now. I go through waves of denial, anxiety, fear, confusion, anger, sadness and empathy. I am sure that many of you experience the same.

Although cognizant that everyone reacts differently in times of crisis, I was really feeling the emotions and the gravity of the situation yesterday. I went to the grocery store to get some items to make a special dinner for two of our four children. I returned home in tears. I've spent a lot of time in grocery stores (I worked at Martins in Waynesboro all through high school and summers during college) and never have I witnessed complete silence among shoppers and distressed faces as I did yesterday. Such a different "feel" in the air than the normal chatting and greeting of fellow shoppers you encounter. I soon realized why. The produce isle was well stocked, but as I made the turn from the produce isle to the inner parts of the store, I saw a bare seafood counter, bare shelves in the baking, canned goods, pasta, bread, and frozen vegetable isles. I was prepared to see bare shelves in the paper goods, disinfectants and hand soap/sanitizer isles, but not complete sections of all the other isles in the store. I soon joined the others in the store with my own bewildered look as I absorbed the sad state of affairs and watched shoppers mechanically place item after item in their basket for fear that if they didn't do so now everything would be gone in the store when they returned. I quickly realized that others in the store may need the dwindling items on the shelves more than I, as we do have enough food items at home for a week or so – I may just need to change my planned menu for this evening. So before selecting items that I could find on my list, I asked my fellow shoppers in the isle if any of them were looking for this item and if so, offering the item to them before placing it in my basket. I also volunteered to climb the shelves for others to retrieve that last boxed item or canned good that was stashed on the shelf beyond reach. For a moment, my consideration brought a smile to their face and mine. It felt wonderful to feel helpful to others in need.

An hour later, Bert and I had our first reality dose of social/physical distancing. I was scheduled for an outpatient test at the hospital. Upon approaching the building, we were instructed to "STOP" about 6 feet short of the entrance and asked several questions while standing there in a frozen state. I was ultimately permitted entrance, but Bert denied as he was not the patient. What an odd feeling we both felt. He has always accompanied me and is the first face I would see in the waiting room after a test or procedure. Now he was instructed to wait in the car or on a bench outside. I immediately thought of all the patients in the hospital who are not permitted visitors and how lonely and isolated they must feel.

There is no doubt that we are in uncharted territory these days, but with God's help and with compassion for others we will get through this, stronger and more resilient than ever. Today's Lenten Devotional is a timely reminder of this. When we believe in and trust God enough to see us through these difficult times, we will be victorious and be able to rest. Our own self sufficiency is inadequate, but if we believe in God's Blessed Assurance, we will find rest/peace.

As you hunker down during these next few days/weeks, some of us will be with family while others will be alone. Please take a moment to reach out to one another. A telephone call, card or note will help those who are alone feel not so lonely. Don't hesitate to reach out to one another if you are in need – be it emotional, spiritual or physical. Your friend, neighbor or a member of our church family just might have the item or paper good you ran out of and will be happy to assist. Turn your troubles over to God, believe in his blessed assurance and accept his love to give you strength to weather this storm.

I leave you with scripture from **2 Corinthians 1:3-4 New International Version (NIV)**

Praise to the God of All Comfort

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

Many blessings for your safety, health and comfort,

Laurie