

“ONE, TWO, THREE, APRONS UP!”

John 17:1-11

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I've missed you. I've missed being with you, and I know you've missed being together. There's something unique which happens when, as the scripture says, two or three gather together in God's name. The Spirit is in our midst.

And so, what do we do as we are scattered... sure, we are grateful for the technology great minds have created, which allows us to commune across the airwaves. We share our cares and concerns... our hopes and our deepest fears... and while it is not optimal... we are doing our best to be church... although scattered.

At the same time, this time has brought some surprises. For some in families, I am hearing little bits and pieces of how this time has provided unintended gifts... time with family to be together without the interruption of what had become such a hectic pace of life. People are taking long walks together out in nature; families are playing board games and getting to spend time that they normally wouldn't have had time to do before due to commuting for work.

And there are those who are being attentive to your spiritual lives, perhaps as never before. There is time to pray and be quiet in this time of quarantine.

The power of praying for someone else... someone you know and love is precious. Many people talk of those in their lives whom they know have prayed for them... oftentimes it's the mothers and grandmothers they point to. I know I sometimes take for granted when my mother says she

is praying for me... with a quick... oh thanks mom. Or during this time when I have gotten a word of encouragement and appreciation from you, telling me you're praying for me. Maybe it's giving me feedback on a sermon or gratitude for the ability to see our sanctuary and memorial garden as well as our people participating on a weekly basis. That's no small thing, and I thank you. I need to hear from you and I need your prayers in these times.

As I was preparing for this sermon, I spent most of Monday working on another direction for this sermon... praying for what word needed to be preached. And then Tuesday morning, I awoke and, in my prayers, my thoughts centered on Susanna Wesley. I hadn't thought about her in years... and I restarted the sermon...

If you don't know about Susannah Wesley... she is a woman for this time...

One author begins her biographical history this way:

If a passing stranger walking through the rural village of Epworth, England, on any given day between 1700 and 1720 had peered through the window of the home of the rector of the local Anglican church, he might have caught sight of something quite strange. Depending on the time of day, this observer might have seen a woman sitting in a chair with her kitchen apron pulled up over her head while ten children read, studied, or played all around her.

While that may or may not mirror the scene in your houses during this time of homeschooling and quarantine... Susannah Wesley found a way to have private time to pray even in the most chaotic time! She did it basically as a single parent, because her husband, Samuel Wesley was an itinerant preacher and gone much of the time. He was also reportedly a somewhat difficult man.

Susannah was the 25th of 25 children born to her parents. She had very little formal education, but she grew up in an academic household. Her older siblings were very well-read and Susannah caught that love of reading as well, thus laying the groundwork for her wisdom and education.

She married at 19 and she and Samuel Wesley had 19 children... They would know deep sorrow and tragedy, however, as nine of those children would die in infancy... including 2 sets of twins. Her life/their life as a couple was not easy... Samuel did not do well in his job. It was widely known that as an intellectual, he struggled to connect emotionally to his parish and was divisive; and so much of his career was spent writing about the book of Job... away from home. He spent much of his meager salary gambling and trying to make a go of it in other ways.

But that left Susannah minding the farm, which was part of the manse... and homeschooling their 10 children pretty much alone. School hours were from 9:00 a.m. to noon and then 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., six days a week. All but the smallest children completed their assigned chores promptly before the start of the school day. As in many one-room schoolhouses in generations past, older children helped teach the younger. Girls were as educated as the boys... something rare in that time.

Perhaps even more important, though... She knew from personal experience that quality one-on-one time with a parent is hard to come by in a family with many children, yet powerfully important. So she set a rotating schedule through which each of her children spent an hour with her alone before bedtime on a designated night each week.

How did she manage to keep it together herself? Susannah did not neglect time for herself. Two hours a day... of reading the scripture and praying for her spouse, her children—and she did it all in the midst of her

family life... when the apron went up over her head... everyone knew she was off limits for that entire time.

What were some of the gifts of that difficult... even impossible period? Her own ministry flourished as she started and led a bible study with over 200 regular attendees. Two of her sons, John and Charles grew up to be leaders in what would become the United Methodist Church. By the time of her death at the age of seventy-three, Susanna had lived long enough to see her sons John and Charles become world-renowned leaders of the global Christian movement. Her legacy, forged in large part in those diligent hours of intercession under that makeshift apron tent.

The scripture stories since Easter have been about post-resurrection appearances of Jesus among those whom he had loved so much... and with whom he had invested his ministry... During those times, he reminded them of his most important teachings once again, and solidified the community before he would ascend into heaven. In today's scripture, we see up close and personal into the mind of Jesus as he prepared to ascend... how he prayed for those whom he had grown to love so deeply during his time on earth before letting them go.

Who are the people who pray for you? And for whom are you praying in these days? The time you spend doing that will have lasting repercussions in your life and the lives of those for whom you pray. This week I put the metaphorical apron over my head and prayed for each of you who are in our directory in addition to others.

Next week, we celebrate Pentecost... the coming of the Spirit which would empower all people to do the work that God has given us. It's no accident that Jesus' prayer before he ascended was in a sense asking God to prepare them for that upcoming ministry.

When we come out of this time... we will be ready to discern where the Spirit is leading us.

May it be so, Alleluia! Amen~