

Jesus Christ is the same — yesterday, today and forever

'The one thing I am certain of

Donna Frischknecht Jackson Presbyterians Today



Even when writing in times of national crisis (9/11) and personal loss, words never abandoned me as they have now. I'm not sure what to write because I don't know what our lives will be like by the time you read this. What I do know is that the comfort we took in the predictability of our rinse-and-repeat lives screeched to a halt during Lent when COVID-19 brought us phrases like "flatten the curve" and "social distancing." The pandemic made us scramble for alternative ways to work, school our children and preach God's Word. It was truly a Lenten journey in which the invitation to walk more closely with Christ was no longer an option, but mandatory. The world was given a divine timeout that it needed. And with fatalities from the virus rising, concerns for my elderly parents, disabled brother and truck driver husband had me reevaluating what was important. Was I being true to myself - to God's call in my life?

I couldn't stop thinking how bidding adieu to the old world wasn't bad. I heard stories of time-stressed families sitting down to a meal together. I caught a glimpse of Presbyterians stepping out of their comfort zones to try something new like streaming worship online. These steps have been long overdue. For far too long we have been wandering in the wilderness questioning God's guidance. Behind the questioning were our agendas to get back the church of yesterday - to be the church we wanted; not what God wants. As a pastor, I've felt the frustration of leading God's children into uncharted territory, where new ideas, like moving Sunday school away from Sunday and slowing down all programming to pray more, were looked upon as crazy. One of the craziest ideas I had was that of being a "modern-day circuit rider" in my rural area. I suggested that the churches use video conferencing to "beam" me in on a given Sunday. I would preach in person at one church per week, with the other churches tuning in online. Each church would have me in person one Sunday a month and utilize virtual preaching the other Sundays. The idea tanked. No one was willing to risk using technology in such a way on Sunday morning. That was three years ago.

Now COVID-19 has created a deluge of Presbyterian YouTube personalities who have had to master online worship overnight. I, too, picked up the camera again and resurrected my idea of online devotionals filmed at my Vermont "farm. When I posted the videos to the church's Facebook page, something happened: They were well received! The crazy idea wasn't so crazy after all. I believe we are only beginning to process the impact COVID-19 will have on our ministries. I also believe that the impact goes beyond the use of technology.

This is about being faithful in serving God's children within the context to which God has called us. For some, that might mean utilizing the old-fashioned phone tree to keep connected with parishioners. And that's okay. Wherever we go, I just pray we don't go backward. I pray we dare to risk big and boldly for the glory of God. I see something beautiful that I didn't see before. I see the reassuring message that in our changing world, God is still working through us. No matter what happens, Jesus Christ is the same - yesterday, today and forever.