

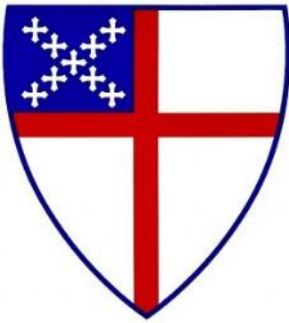


# THE ANCHOR

MAY 2020

*St. Clement's by-the-Sea*  
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Welcoming all since 1929



**Member, Anglican  
Communion  
PARISH MISSION:**

*Follow Christ through the way we live and love, spreading the good news of God in Christ, opening our hearts to all, and experience and spread joy in the process.*



**“This Church of Ours is Open To All...There Will Be No Outcasts.”**

-The Most Rev. Edmund Browning Emeritus  
*Presiding Bishop*



## **Pandemic...**

I've heard a question many times over the last two months regarding Coronavirus. It goes something like this, "So, Father Patrick, are we experiencing something like the Egyptians experienced when God sent them the plagues?" Sometimes this question is in gest. Sometimes it isn't. Sometimes it is in reaction to another stunning headline that leaves people shouting out, "what in the world, are these the plagues of Egypt!" Serendipitous enough, we are studying the book of Exodus in our bible study so I've had a little time to reflect on this question, even before we were all consigned to our homes.



The heart of this question gets to our understanding of God, and who God is. One school of thought is that God punishes us with virus, disease even pandemic. That these are the just deserts of sinfulness. Just as God unleashed ten plagues upon Pharaoh, so God has unleashed this plague upon us. The goal here is punishment, with the desired outcome of humility and penitence. If you know me at all, you know that, in general, I don't subscribe to that understanding of God. Even while I hold that God did punish Pharaoh and his people for afflicting hard labor upon the Hebrew people, and ultimately liberated the latter (and I would argue, the former too).

Related to the aforementioned view is an understanding of illness and disease being a result of human sinfulness. And if you think this is just an Old Testament way of thinking about God, consider another example. When the disciples ask Jesus about a man born blind, "who sinned this man or his parents that he was born blind" they reflect this point of view. That was the prevailing wisdom at the time, in fact, for any affliction, blindness, leprosy, whatever. In this view, God is a hard disciplinarian and we are unruly children who only learn through suffering. And while I believe it is a fact that one's sins and poor choices do negatively affect those we love, I don't believe that this is God's desire for us.

Another biblical way of understanding illness is that it doesn't come from God at all. It isn't God who sends disease and illness, but rather Satan who does. Illness in Jesus' time was often attributed to demonic possession, for example. In this view, God in Christ is the one who frees us from such affliction and liberates us from Satan's grasp. God loves us and his desire is for our health and salvation. Christ beats back Satan and the resultant joy for the redeemed is without measure. Consider what Jesus says when he is criticized for healing a poor woman on the Sabbath. "Ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath" (Lk 13:16).

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With this understanding of illness and disease, it isn't just the sinful who suffer, in fact, the more righteous may suffer even greater struggles. But, we might ask, if God's desire for humanity is health in salvation, why is Satan ever permitted to afflict us as he does? This is the underlying question explored in the Book of Job, where a truly righteous man suffers terribly. In the form of a folk story we are given kind of an answer. Satan is permitted to test our resolve, through his afflictions. He tests our faith in God, the Almighty, and in so doing we grow in our knowledge and love of God who also proves himself faithful to us. We discover the depths of God's love and power and the faithfulness and true love of those in our lives, our family and friends.

I certainly find more in that view that seems real to me of the God I know and love, even while this view creates some big theological challenges. Such as, why would the good and righteous suffer equally, maybe even more so, than the sinful and evil. The basic conclusion is one that is familiar to my ministry, that bad things sometimes do happen to really good people. They don't deserve it, and we need God to deliver us, as he ultimately does for Job. In the folk story style of Job, it is definitely Satan who is responsible for Job's suffering, not Job due to his sinfulness and not God. But God has allowed Job to be "tested" in this way. It is ultimately for good, but Job suffers terribly in the process.

This relates to another understanding of illness and disease, as an aspect of God's unfolding plan. While not the explicit desire of our loving God, but as an unfortunate aspect of a greater good. Much like a grape that must struggle in order to produce a good wine, so do we in a sense. I'm here thinking in terms of St. Paul's comment in the book of Romans, "suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us" (5:3-5). There is something edifying in the experience. If we hadn't lived through it, we would have been the lesser for that. So, we might ask, what is edifying about our current experience? What are we learning through this pandemic?

That last example isn't necessarily a fulsome biblical understanding of disease and illness but may echo some biblical views. In that concept, illness and disease are in essence "accidents" that is to say that everything God has created is for good, ultimately. Because God is good. And that as God's plan unfolds there may be some things that occur that though not necessarily God's explicit desire per se, can still be for ultimate good. Here is a metaphor to illustrate the point, the earth moves and changes, because it is alive. But, we also suffer earthquakes as a consequence. Earthquakes often hurt or kill people. But the greater good is that the earth is a living, fruitful planet, that sustains our human needs.

Well, it is the greater good unless someone you love is the victim of an earthquake. Another fascinating example of this theological approach is something I read about recently, where doctors were using deactivated HIV virus to deliver corrective genes into cells of children suffering from Severe Combined Immunodeficiency (SCID). It turns out that the virus is incredibly effective as a delivery mechanism for saving these kids lives. And while HIV and AIDS has taken the lives of people I love, we are surely grateful to God that the deactivated virus could be used in this way, to save life. Further, I know that HIV/AIDS taught me (and many others probably) a great deal about compassion and love of neighbors. A clear good! But it was a costly grace.

Here then are at least three different theological approaches and understandings of disease, illness and pandemic. In the first example, God is punishing human sin. "No fault insurance" does not exist in this scheme, there are no accidents, someone is always to blame! There are those who are making this judgment right now. They are saying it is someone in Wuhan's fault. And, It may be the current pandemic is the result of some human sin. But, perhaps that sin is the ever-expanding intrusion of humanity upon the natural world's only remaining habitats. That is to say, that it is humanity's collective sin rather than anyone's particular sin. As we invade new niches, we also encounter new diseases.

Perhaps someone did something with a bat, the most likely culprit (given that both SARS and MERS came from that source), that they shouldn't have. Maybe they kept one as a pet! I say, "Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone." I think researchers need to know in order to find ways to combat the disease, and to make recommendations for us of what not to do. But, I don't think we need to know in order to have someone to blame. It is fascinating to me that these diseases are present in other species and don't seem to affect them the way they affect us. Perhaps that could be useful information to medical researchers to preserve life, though that knowledge will have come at a terribly high cost.

I do not believe that God is punishing us, as in the plagues that were sent upon Pharaoh (to break his hard heart). But, I do believe that God can bring good even out of this pandemic.

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In the second approach, it is Satan that afflicts humanity with disease and illness. These are not the divine desire for creation, but are in fact opposed to it. Illness and disease are permitted only in that they test and ultimately strengthen our faith. We discover, as those who Christ healed discovered, that God is more powerful than any affliction and is the Lord of life and health and wholeness. Trials may come, but God is with us. We learn much of God's love, and the faithfulness of those around us, through these sufferings. Here all are subject to these trials, both the blessed and the cursed and perhaps the blessed even more so. Ultimately, we come forth with greater knowledge of God and of his faithfulness.

The last approach assumes that accidents or unintended consequences do exist in a created order that is evolving, growing and alive. That these exist as God's plan for us unfolds, and that while we cannot always immediately see the greater good in the midst of our struggles, there is one, and God is bringing it about. Here we acknowledge that God's will is truly inscrutable for us mere humans. And that while we may not know now, we will know some day, when we look through the glass not dimly but with full knowledge. We will emerge a people transformed and for the better. We will be more compassionate, more Godly, through this process, much like gold is refined as in a furnace.

Ultimately, we don't know, do we? I've been saying that a lot lately. "We don't know." And maybe that is the point. We cannot know or control the who or the why of pandemic. We can only control our reaction to it. What will we learn from this experience? Will we be more compassionate people? More empathetic to the needs of others? In the coming weeks, for example, as we feel the full affect upon thirty million people who are out of work, what will be our reaction be? How might God be shaping, transforming, our hearts through these challenging times? Are we learning greater love for our families, friends and neighbors, even the stranger?

I accept that we are not guaranteed a long, mortal life, nor perfect health, in this world. Challenges exist but God is with us in our sufferings and loves us. This I believe. And his grace is sufficient for us. I believe that we will live with God eternally. I believe that Jesus taught us perfectly the depths of God's love for us. I do not believe that God intends for us to suffer illnesses that cause such sufferings in families, as I have witnessed in my ministry. But I also believe that God can redeem those sufferings and make us better, more Christ-like people, through them. I do not think that God desired HIV or COVID-19 or any other affliction for us, but I do believe that God transformed me and can transform us through these challenges.

We can come forth from these times a more compassionate, more loving, people. The cross has taught me that what Satan might intend for evil, God can transform for our everlasting good. And I do believe that God is the Lord of health and wholeness and salvation. And that we rightly pray to God for these things.

What do you believe? Send me a note at [frpatrick@scbythesea.org](mailto:frpatrick@scbythesea.org)

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Patrick

# Jesus of the Scars

A few weeks ago, as I was preparing for my sermon I found a beautiful poem. I did not use it in that sermon but I haven't been able to let it go. It has stayed with me all these days so I decided to share it with you. Maybe you have read it as well. *Jesus of the Scars*. It was written in 1917, by Edward Shillito, a pastor in Great Britain during World War I.



Perhaps the similarities of our times made me hold on to it. Even though we are not at war, some have compared our present situation to being in one. Only this war is not against human beings but against an enemy that we cannot see and one we know too little about. I know many of us have felt overwhelmed by our social distancing situation but especially by how little we can do to help those we love when they fall victims of this invisible enemy. The stories are heartbreaking and the love, commitment and strength of those caring for our loved ones will remain with us for years to come. Crisis like these always bring the best and the worst in humanity. I prefer to hold on to the best.

I can't even imagine being a priest during a war. How do you tend to people who return from the front, broken and wounded? How do you show them that there is a God that loves them dearly? Maybe Edward Shillito was feeling overwhelmed as well and knew that people needed to be healed both physically and emotionally. They needed to see a God that looked like them. A God with scars. And he did a wonderful job at writing this poem that showed them and shows us a Messiah with wounds.

*"Jesus of the Scars"*

by Edward Shillito

If we have never sought, we seek Thee now;  
 Thine eyes burn through the dark, our only stars;  
 We must have sight of thorn-pricks on Thy brow,  
 We must have Thee, O Jesus of the Scars.  
 The heavens frighten us; they are too calm;  
 In all the universe we have no place.

# Jesus of the Scars

Our wounds are hurting us; where is the balm?  
Lord Jesus, by Thy Scars, we claim Thy grace.  
If, when the doors are shut, Thou drawest near,  
Only reveal those hands, that side of Thine;  
We know today what wounds are, have no fear,  
Show us Thy Scars, we know the countersign.  
The other gods were strong; but Thou wast weak;  
They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne;  
But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak,  
And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone.

The sermon I was preparing for was the second Sunday in Easter. That day when our resurrected Lord appeared to the disciples as they were behind locked doors in that upper room. This Jesus that comes to them, shows them his scars and even offers Thomas to touch them so he may believe. And as you may remember, Thomas declares a powerful faith statement, "My Lord, my God."

As always, I would love to hear from you. Have you heard of this poem? As you read it, how did it make you feel? Are you taking care of yourself during these difficult times? Can we help you?

Please know that you are loved and that even though we are not able to be together, we are together in Christ, our Lord and our God.

In Christ,

Mo. Norma Guerra

714.581.3841

[RevNorma@scbythesea.org](mailto:RevNorma@scbythesea.org)

# Columbaria

The pergola and columbaria projects are nearing completion, with a City of San Clemente inspection on the site on April 28.

The columbaria project was authorized to proceed to the final phase, which is to install the roof and sides on each of the two structures. When that construction is complete there will be a final inspection, and upon approval the columbaria and the pergola will be authorized for us by the parish.



*Mike Badstubner, St. Clement's parishioner, and City of San Clemente building inspector reviewing the pergola construction and the building plans.*

# A Word from our Finance Chair

On behalf of our Rector, our Staff and Vestry, I bring you Eastertide Greetings.

To say that this has been a challenging Spring is an understatement. Our world, our families, and our church community have all been subject to unimagined disruption and stress as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic. If that wasn't enough, our church offices and school building were damaged by flood water during the recent storms, the final costs of which is yet to be determined. However, the optimistic spirit and resilience of our people is often best revealed in challenging times, and YOU continue to make good things happen.

The physical church, our Clergy and Staff, and all the good works they support, relies almost entirely on the financial support of our congregation. I'm pleased to report that over the past two months, You, the true community of St. Clement's by the Sea, have continued to support our Church by faithfully fulfilling your pledge obligations and helping with other special contributions. Our pledge income is still on par with our budget, and this has allow us to retain all our staff, offer virtual services, support our congregations' pastoral needs, and meet our ongoing financial obligations.

We are confident that our Church community will more than just survive these times, but will actually be strengthened by our shared journey. Please accept our collective appreciation for all that you continue to do to 'seek and serve Christ' through your sustained support.

Pat Warren

Vestry Finance Chair

*“St. Clement’s hosts its first Virtual Coffee Hour.”*



We were able to host our first virtual coffee hour on Sunday, April 26th and it proved to be a success. It was great to be able to see everybody’s faces and catch up a bit. We look forward to more of these virtual coffee hours until we are able to gather again in person.

Thank you for your continued perseverance in our online services and virtual gatherings as we maneuver through the uncharted waters. Our times together are truly cherished.



# May Birthdays

1-Claudia Berber  
 1-Julia Hutcheson  
 2-Elaine Viele  
 3-Mel Mothershead  
 5-Rod Rodriguez  
 7-Bob Corless  
 8-Iliana Farias  
 8-Bob Gergen



11-Chris Miller  
 11-Grayson Wallett  
 15-Myrna Gray  
 17-Gail Milne  
 18-Kevin Delgado  
 22-Debbie Neville  
 24-Ken Baxter  
 24-Christi Seminoff

## Anniversaries

6- Patrick & Christina Crerar



20- Jon Ulz & Susan Leal



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Dear Friends,

Mother's Day is coming up on Sunday, May 10th, and many of you are shopping for the perfect gifts to honor your mother on her special day!

When you purchase your Mother's Day gifts at [Smile.Amazon.com](https://Smile.Amazon.com), AmazonSmile donates to St. Clement's. This is a wonderful opportunity to honor both your mother, the church, and her mission.

For assistance, please contact Spring: [info@scbythesea.org](mailto:info@scbythesea.org)

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# *St. Clement's by-the-Sea* EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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## **San Clemente's First Church**

*Welcoming all since 1929*



### **SUNDAY WORSHIP**

8:00am Holy Communion Rite I, Nursery

10:00am Holy Communion Rite II with Choir, Nursery, Sunday School

12:00pm La Misa en Español

202 Avenida Aragon  
San Clemente, CA 92672

### **OFFICE HOURS**

Monday—9:00am-1:00pm

Tuesday-Friday—8:00am-1:00pm

Phone: 949.492.3401

E-mail: [info@scbythesea.org](mailto:info@scbythesea.org)

Website: [www.scbythesea.org](http://www.scbythesea.org)

The Rev. Patrick Crerar, Rector