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Our Senior Warden for Good Shepherd, Philip Moros, has opened our Vestry meetings for the last couple of months with a time of reflection on how the conditions of the pandemic are causing us to feel a loss and what it is that we have gained as well during the pandemic. Thinking about this this week, I'm not sure exactly why, but I feel the loss of the events normally associated with the Fourth of July a little deeper than I expected. I didn't think it would make a difference, but it just doesn't seem right to go through Independence Day without a parade or a fireworks display. There was one thing, however, that did make up for this peculiar Fourth of July: last year Elizabeth and I and our daughter Hannah and grandson Jemmy went to the Kellogg-Hubbard Library in Montpelier for the reading of Frederick Douglass' address, "What to the slave is the Fourth of July?" It was sponsored by the Vermont Humanities Council, and although this year there was not a public reading due to the pandemic, there was an amazing reading that was broadcast on Vermont Public Radio: this was a reading of Douglass' address by five young descendants of Frederick Douglass. It was really moving to hear the words of this stirring address read by his great-great-great whatever great grandchildren, and to hear a new generation grapple with the issues that were raised in this speech when Douglass first delivered it a few years before the Civil War. So while I did feel the loss of a typical Fourth of July this year, I also found that small loss was more than offset by the stirring experience of listening to these young people take up the call for equality and racial reconciliation for our nation.

Prayer: Most merciful and glorious God, be present with us in your Word and may your Word refresh and renew our faith, this we ask in the Name of Jesus our savior and friend. Amen.

I have noticed the in many of the conversations with people I've had over the past few weeks that there is a sense of weariness running through them. Some of the people I have spoken to have expressed some sort of frustration, or some sort of a feeling of becoming exhausted. And before I go on talking about others, I must say I've certainly felt that myself, just feeling a little more run down or ragged than usual. Maybe since I feel this way, that's the reason I think I hearing it more from others, but I don't think so. I do believe there is a good deal of weariness among us. And of course, I don't even have to think about it very long to know that this is not just out of the blue, but there are some very well recognized causes we are all familiar with: as I said during our weekly clergy meeting this week, it is as if we are living again in 1918 with the Spanish Flu pandemic, and 1932 with the depths of the depression and 1968 with all the civil unrest and protests for change, especially in the call for Civil Rights. But we've gone through all this in a scant four month period! It just makes your head spin. Added to this, of course, is that with this swirl of events, and moving into the future, there is such a great deal of uncertainty: we already knew that with the upcoming presidential election it was going to be chaotic time, but now with the rapid rate of change and the unexpected twists and turns of current events, we don't even know what it is going to be like next Tuesday!

These past four months and the uncertainty of our near future just wears us down. It is no wonder to me at all that many people are reacting to this by simply trying to go back to “normal,” just restarting life right where they left off, taking up their prior activities as if nothing has changed. I think that is why we seem to be having a crazy debate about facial coverings throughout the country as well. Wearing a mask, or even the sight of other people wearing facial coverings is a very visible and obvious reminder that we can just return to “normal”; the coronavirus is still out there, surging in many areas of our nation and throughout the world, and no amount of ignoring it will make it go away. Just saying it will disappear and hoping for this won't work. As an Army Vet I know used to say, “Hope is not a plan!” It is kind of crazy to me: I've never heard anyone make the argument prior to all this that it should be the “personal choice” of a doctor to wear a mask, or not, before performing surgery on a patient, but we hear the claim for “personal choice” about wearing facial coverings in public, and this leads me to believe that, like I said, the masks are a reminder to all, that even if we want to forget it, the pandemic is still underway. Like I said, it is no wonder I am hearing so much weariness, and even feeling it some myself, and it seems so prevalent nowadays.

One thing I do find even more disturbing, though, is that I think the weariness I hear is very widespread in the world now, and I have read a couple of news items recently that report more and more people are feeling depressed. Of course, one symptom of depression is fatigue, and I worry that the weariness I hear about may be covering for something more serious, covering

some forms of depression. Also, I think this is related to the serious economic chaos many are experiencing now as well. With millions out of work, millions of others right on the edge, and the stress of being hungry, getting evicted, or simply just the fear that these losses now loom as real possibilities, this just wears people down. I believe that both this emotional depression and the stress on people's lives through the economic chaos caused by unemployment, underemployment or even simply being laid off for a time, even if the prospect of going back to work is almost guaranteed, it is still very stressful and grinds people down.

Against this backdrop, of course, this bad news and these deep stresses, against these uncertainties and the fears, in our Gospel lesson this morning, we hear the Good News of Jesus: "Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Now it would be easy simply to say, "Come to Jesus and lay that burden down, and Jesus will take care of your weariness." I'm just not really sure that is the case though. I think there is something much deeper here, something that we have to spend some time with, something we have to live in, and live in and with for a while, before that promise of rest and Good News can even begin to become part of our lives and world. Part of the way I have found to come to the depth of what Jesus is telling us is to recall the context for this saying: just prior to this passage, Matthew's Gospel tells us that John the Baptist's disciples had

come to Jesus to ask if Jesus is the Messiah, the chosen one of God, and Jesus answers them by saying they should tell John what they hear and see: the blind can now see, the lame walk, the lepers are clean, the dead are raised and good news is brought to the poor. It is these deeds, deeds of power, but deeds that show God's love and promise that Jesus holds up as the sign of the power of God's love. And then as Jesus goes on to say in the lesson we hear this morning, even if people did not hear the flute playing or the wailing and mourning, even if rejected, because this is so contrary to the way of the world, so much against our experience and so much out of sync with the way of the world, Jesus says that what is really important is something completely counter-cultural, completely unexpected and unlooked for: God's wisdom, God's way, leads us in a different direction: for Jesus, that deep relationship with God, so that his Spirit and God's Spirit are one, a deep relationship that pulls them together, so that the divine wisdom is completely present for Jesus and completely available for those friends and followers of Jesus: and this, this depth of spirit and wisdom, this is the gift Jesus offers. This is the source of rest and renewal: to rest in the faith and deep trust in God's love, the deepening of th relationship with God as creator, God as the provider, God as the sustainer, God as the one who makes a way out of no way.

On this Fourth of July weekend, a Fourth of July so unlike any other we have celebrated ever before, we come together today in our prayer and our worship bringing our burdens, our uncertainty for our future, our deep sense of foreboding for where we are headed in future and our burdens of weariness

from the death and illness, job loss and unemployment we see around us in our nation, both the pandemic newly arrived in our world and the older burdens of racism and inequality; we now bring these burdens to God, we seek God's peace and care, seeking the power of God's love to bring us rest and renewal. The promise of our nation's founding is that all are created equal and by God's grace we will live in freedom and equality so that the "unalienable rights" of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," can be enjoyed by all. This day, we hear the words that in God there is rest and renewal, because our faith teaches us that in God's love we find our hope, a hope that is not obvious, a hope that may seem hidden by the suffering and strife we see so prevalent around us, but in that depth of God's love, in the power of that divine love, a hope shines forth that relieves our weariness, that renews our faith by taking up our burdens, that frees us to go forth and carry on the mission of love that God's love opens for us. As we continue today in prayer and then as we head out to meet the days to come, in the midst of the uncertainties we face, God's love gives us that hope to face the future renewed and refreshed, ready to respond in joy to the journey following our Savior Jesus. This day, we are lifted with joy and gladness, as the Psalmist says, to find that our Savior's yoke is easy, this burden is light, as we join in the deeds of love in the commandment of God, loving our neighbor and loving God, devoted with our whole heart, that we may be united to one another with pure affection. This is God's promise to us today, a promise which is enough today for us to find rest for our souls and to then go out in joy for the mission of love in the Name of our Savior Jesus

Christ. Thanks be to God for this gracious hope and the love we share in Christ Jesus and thanks be to God for the power of this spirit of love we share. Amen.