

**The Value of Gathering Together**  
**The Rev. J. Randolph Alexander, Rector**  
**March 17, 2020**

As any of the folks who sing in our choirs or serve as acolytes know, we gather before our services for a prayer. I often say something in those prayers along the lines of “thank you, Lord God, for the privilege of gathering today as your people.” I really mean that prayer, but it is easy to take that gathering for granted, and for the prayer to become almost perfunctory.

I don’t think I will ever take the privilege of gathering together for granted again, whenever we emerge from this pandemic and the social distancing it has required. As I have said before, we are a parish who like each other (thank God!); we shake hands and hug and kiss and pat each other on the back. We support each other through good and bad, we pray together, we anoint, and we weep together. So much of that, of course, seems now very off-limits. It is almost as if part of our Lenten observance this year has included giving up far more than saying Alleluia. It has involved giving up gathering, itself.

This is, of course, how it must be. We are all working to flatten the curve of disease progression, with the hope that this mitigation will allow our health care system not to be overwhelmed.

Where is God in this? Right here with us, as our parish name itself, Immanuel, reminds us. Our God, who took on our very flesh in Jesus Christ, is no stranger to suffering, disease, and death, and thank God for that. Our God is with us in every kindness we can offer one another, whether through a wave or through a digital greeting. God shows up when we check on those who might be alone, or afraid, or ill. God shows up as we name our fears nakedly and honestly. God shows up when we remind each other that all shall be well, and to remain calm and hopeful, even as we acknowledge our fear, our anger, and our confusion.

We will, of course, make clear announcements about our schedule changes, electronic offerings, and ways to be involved.

Thank God for the community of Immanuel, whether we are meeting in person or through various forms of communication media. Let’s take care of one another, let’s take care of the stranger (whatever form that stranger might take), let’s pray, let’s believe, let’s share, and let’s never again take for granted the great privilege of gathering together.

God bless you all.