

Dear Friends,

As I write this, I wonder how much the world may have changed by the time you read this article. We have lived with so much change and uncertainty during the pandemic.



I find comfort and certainty in the liturgical seasons. As we begin our Lenten journey, I look forward to singing ‘Forty Days Forty Nights.’ It has always been my go-to hymn during Lent and this year its meaning is amplified as I sing those words,

“Shall not we your trials share, learn your discipline of will and with you by fast and prayer wrestle with power of hell? Saviour, may we hear your voice—keep us constant at your side and with you shall rejoice at the Eternal Eastertide.”

I really need to hear this hymn as we go through our own forty days/months and thousand nights in the wilderness of COVID-19—a journey into the unknown just like eternal Eastertide!

When the pandemic started, I took out an ironing board from St. Stephen’s Sacristy to preach via my laptop with the hope that it would be a six-month pandemic. Twenty months later, I am still preaching and officiating church liturgy from an ironing board.



In the course of those 20 months, we have lost friends, parishioners and close relatives without having a chance to walk with them. Some were sick for a long time in isolation. Worse still we could not come and grieve together as a community. I still have a family waiting for me to officiate at the funeral of their mother who died in July of 2020.



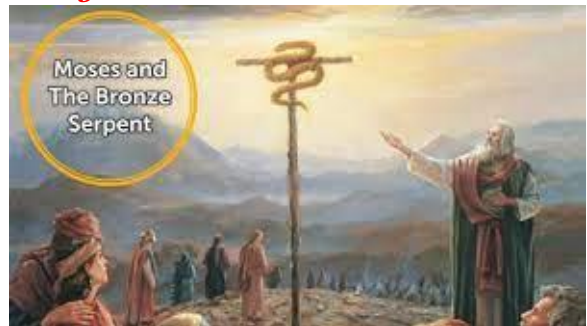
This is delayed grief that takes a toll on us.



Between lockdowns and partial re-openings, new waves and more lockdowns, some days it feels like we are going in circles like the children of Israel in the wilderness. They did everything God asked of them, put blood on the doorposts and left the land, but did it mean they would have a straightforward journey? Moses lifted the snake

and all who were bitten by the snake were healed.

*Image Source: Sermons.com.*



How about us? We had our vaccines and some are on number 4, but still, we cannot turn the clock back to 2019. I thought that, with the children getting vaccinated, life would start to return to a new normal. But the Omicron variant meant that the new year began much like the last one with the children learning online. My two children are very different. One is an extrovert and the other an introvert but they both missed in-person learning.

Like many other parents, grandparents and guardians, I had to monitor and supervise their never-ending homework.

I was happy when they returned to school but also worried about them catching the virus. I long for a world free of the pandemic, but no one can offer that. So, I guess I will take in-person learning with the risk that I may miss work because I might be in isolation one Sunday. Friends, that is a lot to go through alone, and I need a physical community to help me deal with all this. Is it the same at your house?

I often receive calls from people with serious illnesses and, in the past, I would go pray and console them. Not anymore. I can no longer do that because they need to limit their contacts for their treatments and appointments. I would like our whole church to surround them, lay their hands on them and pray for their healing, or to walk with them.

The hugs, tears from one another that soothe our souls, and laughter in the hall at fellowship are muted in lockdown times.

Friends, our clergy and bishop hear you; they see you and you are always in their thoughts and prayers. If they, being mere mortals can understand you, how much more deeply can our God who is omnipresent in every place and every home? Friends of mine have a plaque in their dining room which reads, "Christ is the Center of our Home, a Guest at Every Meal and a Silent Listener to Every Conversation."

Friends, we are never alone. Remember the Scripture, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." God is walking with us."

Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." We all carry the weight of the trauma, whether we have thrived or floundered.

"Saviour, may we hear your voice, keep us constant at your side," I sing again. The journey to Eastertide is going to be long but do not give up. "So if Satan, pressing hard, soul and body would destroy, Christ who conquered, be our guard; ..."

With Christ who conquered the evil in the wilderness and overcame death on the third day we shall overcome and rejoice one day. I do not know the day but my faith tells me that God will have the last word!

I wish you a blessed Lenten journey as you navigate the pandemic.

Blessings,

The Reverend Canon George Kwari.