Hi,

I imagine we are all striving for a bit of normalcy right now. Allison Jean just hosted a staff chapel at 9:15, just as we have chapel at 9:15 every Tuesday. [She included this prayer](http://www.lynnungar.com/poems/pandemic/), which you may want to use in your own prayer-time.

I got an email this morning from N.T. Wright Online, who is offering Wright’s on-line course on Philippians for **free for the next two days**. [Click here to enroll for free](https://www.udemy.com/course/paul-and-his-letter-to-the-philippians-small-group-edition/?utm_source=N.T.+Wright+Online+Master+List&utm_campaign=c99680fdda-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_03_16_03_57&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_7ce9dc4e26-c99680fdda-431027149&mc_cid=c99680fdda&mc_eid=b45ca3d6fc&couponCode=NTWRIGHT-GIFT-PHIL). But don’t wait -- next two days only.

I’m working on being able to host on-line classes of my own. More on this in the next few days.

“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us.”

(1 John 4:18-19)

It is easy to feel overwhelmed and fearful in this time. But John urges us to forsake fear and live in confidence. Though in this letter John writes specifically about Christian confidence related to the time of judgment, Glenn Barker writes, “John probably believed that ‘confidence’ was the mark of a believer in every relationship to God (see 3:21 & 5:14). . . . To live in love is to live in God; and this results in complete confidence.” Sometimes it can be hard to know what to make of such statements. John is not merely exhorting Christians to be strong and confident; he is reminding them that Christians must always look forward. We know that the story ends well – for us and for all of creation. John urges his readers to be confident of Christ’s coming (2:28-33) and to remember the promise of eternal life with God (2:25). The early Christian communities lived with a keen sense of expectation. They eagerly awaited the final consummation of God’s kingdom.

I suspect that many of us do not live in such hopeful expectation. It boils down to this. God loves us, as demonstrated by his sending of his Son, and nothing can separate us from this love . . . nothing! (see Romans 8:38-39) In turn, “we love because he first loved us” (4:19). In this loving relationship, we can find peace and confidence and strength and assurance because God will never abandon us, regardless of what life throws at us. Yes, you can find peace even in the midst of Covid-19, but only in Christ.

John writes to Christians living in community. John commands the believers to love one another and gives it a practical spin. John ties obedience to Jesus to love: “whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection” (2:5). He expresses love as care for the needy: “How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses to help?” (3:17). He writes, “Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers and sisters are liars . . . those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.”

Sometimes people will read these verses about loving our brothers and sisters and see in them a retreat from the universal call to love neighbor, but this would be a mistake. Though John is focused on loving relationships within the community of God’s people, this in no way diminishes Jesus’ demand that we love those who are most difficult for us to love. This is the whole point of the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-27). Indeed, we are to love even our enemies (Matthew: 5:43-48). his seems quite impossible at times, but all things are possible with God – because we abide in God and he in us. So . . . how can we live out this love, even now, when we are unable to gather? How can we love those who are most isolated and alone?

*A link to check out*

It is St. Patrick’s Day, so [here is a link to one of my favorite videos](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQLfgaUoQCw&t=6s). You will meet St. Patrick and learn a bit of good ole’ orthodox theology along the way. (While looking for the Patrick video, YouTube offered me this: [massed bagpipes from Moray, Scotland](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nnG1oUkWBa8). I couldn’t resist. Epic. So I offer it to you as well.)

*Movie recommendation*

The movie *Ruby Sparks* demonstrates better than any textbox the failings of Calvinism. I would love to talk with the young woman who wrote the movie (and plays Ruby) to see if she realized the theological significance of her film. The movie seems like nothing more than a whimsical romantic comedy, but it is much more. You can rent it for a few dollars on Amazon, Apple, and Google Play.

*Book recommendation*

One of my favorite authors who writes about all things Christian is Philip Yancey. I can recommend anything of his for he has never disappointed me. You might check out *Rumors of Another World*, in which Yancey opens our eyes to the larger world around us.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott