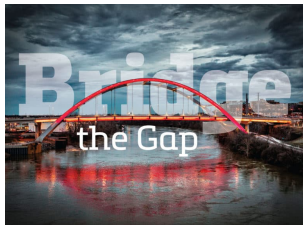


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A Pastor's Note of Support from Homiletics Online

By Timothy Merrill (<https://blog.homileticonline.com/author/tmerrill/>) | March 19, 2020(<https://blog.homileticonline.com/special-installment/a-pastors-note-of-support-from-homiletics-online/>)

note-of-support-from-homiletics-online/)

Dear colleagues in ministry,

Just a note to express our support and understanding of the particular challenges we face as pastors during this time of national – global – upheaval.

Many of our churches – if not most – are now shuttered because of the possibility of contagion, practicing “social distancing” to minimize the possibility of exponentially passing on the virus that has disrupted our lives.

As pastors, you have no doubt begun to creatively adjust. You’re opting for high tech instead of high touch. You offer worship online, you live-stream a “service” on Sunday with a variety of platforms including ZOOM, Facebook live-streaming, online Bible studies and more.

“Social distancing” is the new buzz word. Many restaurants are closed, as are ski resorts, movie theatres and casinos. The NCAA March Madness tournament is gone, the NBA season is suspended, airlines are cutting domestic flights, and weddings have been postponed.

We are very careful, and rightly so, about stepping into crowds. We don’t shake hands with each other. Many wear masks. We wash our hands religiously. So we’re hunkering down with at least a slight sense of optimism – we have hand sanitizer and plenty of toilet paper.

Social distancing is an important strategy.

But here’s the thing: As much as we ought to practice SD, we can be sure of one thing. God quite emphatically does not practice social distancing.

It is not in God’s nature to be distant. The central event in the story of salvation – the Incarnation – is all about God entering our experience, not departing from it. Immanuel – God with us! God will not and does not, distance himself from us. God has not done this in the past, God is not doing it now and God will not do it ever.

This is a theme that runs throughout Scripture. God is near us, not distant from us. This is why the apostle Paul can say with authority:

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39)

In the weeks and months to come, social distancing will require us to make sacrifices and find new ways of staying connected. But as Paul reminds us, God will be with us no matter where we are.

God bless you as you continue to preach the gospel, tend the flock, comfort the afflicted and care for the needy!

Blessings,

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About Timothy Merrill

TIMOTHY MERRILL is an ordained minister and has served churches in Oregon, Minnesota and Colorado. His doctoral work at Princeton Theological Seminary focused on the apocalyptic nature of the preaching of the First Crusade in 1096 A.D. His work has been published in the academic press including the Patristica and Byzantine Review and the Westminster Theological Journal. His book, Learning to Fall: A Guide for the Spiritually Clumsy (Chalice Press) appeared in 1998.

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