There is a prayer that is found in our nighttime office of Compline that has been streaming through my head throughout this week. The prayer is this: “Be present, O merciful God, and protect us through the hours of this night, so that we who are wearied by the changes and the chances of this life may rest in your eternal changelessness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.” And while this is obviously a prayer specifically geared for the end of the day, I think that with just a little change it is especially appropriate for the days we find ourselves facing of late. We are always wearied by the changes and chances of this life – but we are even more so than now when we have entered a time of great anxiety and uncertainty with something as ominous as a ‘pandemic’ in our midst.

There was a moment earlier when I was thinking about what I would say to you all today that I really had wished that Episcopal preachers were not linked so closely to the lectionary readings because I could easily have based a sermon on the ‘do not worry’ passages from Jesus found in Matthew and Luke; the passages from Luke is one that always reminds; 12:22 ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. 23 For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. 24 Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much
more value are you than the birds! 25 And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? 26 If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? 27 Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.

Yet even as we know that these words are right and true and that we cannot added a single hour to our lives by worrying—quite the opposite, in fact, worrying takes time away from our lives, saying ‘do not worry’ sounds a bit trite when the world seems to be in full-on panic mode. That being the case, it is perhaps good that we are closely linked to the lectionary readings because our first reading for today is from Exodus and we hear from the recently freed Hebrew slaves.

The reading is Exodus 17:1-7

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses, and said, “Give us water to drink.” Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?” But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?” So Moses cried out to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.”

The LORD said to Moses, “Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the
elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.” Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

We may find ourselves in really close company with those who wandered in the wilderness, those who wondered “Is the Lord among us on not?” The people had known the pattern of life as slaves and while the circumstances of their lives were far less than desirable there is a certain level of comfort in the known. Now they find themselves living in the unknown. There is no readily available water. There is a shortage of food. Everything they had taken for granted, not even realizing that they had taken it all for granted has been stripped away and they are wandering and anxious and afraid. There are no guarantees anymore. Everything is different. This is uncharted territory. In the days we are living right now we relate to these ancient ancestors who were wandering in the wilderness because we, too, are wandering in the wilderness. Earlier in the week what was ‘known’ seemed to change from moment to moment. Perhaps that moment by moment change in the status quo is slowing a bit but there will be more changes to come, more uncertainty, more anxiousness, more weariness.
The stock market has plummeted and for those who are fortunate enough to have investments this decrease in assets produces anxiety. Those who have young children will be deeply affected by schools being closed and those who have hourly paying positions will be deeply affected by jobs being suspended. How many of us can sustain our families without an income? So we are all anxious and worried and uncertain and when we find ourselves in those sorts of emotional states we do not usually behave as our best selves. Our reptilian brain kicks in and we resort to fight or flight reactions, which rarely have good outcomes. The good news is that flight is pretty much out and we are mostly separated from each other so fighting, other than on social media, text messages and emails will be at a minimal as well. Let’s make a decision together not to resort to those parts of our brains if at all possible.

During this season of Lent when we are invited to take stock of our lives, to repent and return to God, during this particular Lent where so much of the activity of our normal daily lives has been suspended, let us take the opportunity given, to slow down, and to really look at our lives, who we are, whose we are and who we are called be.

There will be many needs that come to the fore as we move into this new reality. We each have something to offer to the world around us, even if we cannot be physically present with each other. Imagine who might be cheered by a phone
conversation, or a note. Someone may need help with groceries or prescriptions or other errands. Another may need help in the breech with living expenses. Please help as you can or refer folks to me because there are funds here.

No matter how anxious or wearied or fearful we find ourselves, no matter how alone we may feel let us remember that we are never left alone. We have an opportunity to reach in and to reach out and to find new ways to work together as the body of Christ in the world, in this time.

“Be present, O merciful God, and protect us through the hours of this uncertain time, so that we who are wearied by the changes and the chances of this life may rest and trust in your eternal changelessness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

It is my hope that we can continue to provide daily prayer or meditation and musical offerings on-line during this time of separation where many could feel particularly lonely and disconnected. If there are particular needs that you have or if you have thoughts or ideas or suggestions of how we might best reach out to our neighbors and if you are able and willing to assist in any way please do email me at rector r-e-c-t-o-r@calvaryepiscopal.org. That email address will be available on our Facebook page and on our webpage. You may also call the church at (502)587-6011. The voicemail messages will be checked daily. My extension is 12. This, too is found on Facebook and on email.

I pray for the health of you all, for the health of our community, our nation and our world. Amen.