

Good morning church. Welcome to *our* home. This time of sharing has been *remarkably difficult* for me to prepare. I don't know that you will be able to understand what I mean by that, but the temptation to *simply record a message and post it* has been there - because it is the simplest way to communicate on-line. But I have never viewed my opportunities to share with you, as something I did and you received. It has always been *us sharing together*, listening to Holy Spirit. *How many times have you heard me tell you* that Holy Spirit changed what I was going to say on the morning I was speaking. And if he prompts to throw away the notes at any given place, we throw away the notes.

Preparing in advance and simply recording it was a loss to me, because I *wouldn't have you*. You are the reason I love to share. Being *with you*, together. I miss hearing the laughter at my expense. I miss watching your agony as I force you to break out into smaller groups to discuss a point. So I have resisted prerecording "a talk" because I don't want to miss out on being *with you* when I share.

Over the next few weeks we are going to continue to experiment on how to provide the most meaningful experience for us as we connect online. *Every presenter* will bring their own flavour. Some will be pre-recorded. Some will be longer; some will be shorter. It isn't as though we have restaurant reservations or anything. ~ Last Sunday, as Travis led us in worship, I saw something that I hadn't identified.

We're longing for community. *I long* to have a place where *we can* connect. ~ You probably saw the YouTube video from Italy of neighbours singing from their apartments to each other. It brought them *such joy to be able to be* together. And it spread to Texas and people doing the same thing.

When we're isolated from each other, there is a strong felt need to not be alone; to connect with people who are important to us.

One thing I have learned about tragedy and suffering throughout *my life* is that it reveals our true character. The real you seeps out and it will tell you *a lot about* yourself. Every time I walk into a grocery store and see empty shelves; I see something profound about our community.

So think about this. This series we are beginning today was decided upon back *in February*. *Were you thinking about a global pandemic in February?* ~ We weren't either. ~ So I invite you to pause for a moment and consider your present circumstance. Does it *encourage you to know* that God directed us to *this* theme *2 months ago*? As you realize what we are facing *now*, notice our theme for the coming weeks: **"Through Thick and Thin. Living in Community."** ~ **that's the summary of God's message to us in this time.**

As one of the presenters, it gives *me* a peace, because live streaming is very different than standing in front of you on a Sunday morning. I can look out across the gym, and *I can see whose sleeping*. And *I feel good inside*, because I have been instrumental in some weary soul's life and provided them with a good sleep for 20 minutes. *But here*, it feels like I'm talking to myself. And to be honest, that's a bit like turning on the TV and only having the shopping channel to watch. Nothing is worse than falling asleep in your own sermon.

So here we are. All our patterns are disrupted. And the challenge is that our *inner feelings* are coming to the surface. We're beginning to recognize that we are in a vulnerable place. And *vulnerability is usually* something we have been able to avoid in the past.

Understand *this can be a rich time* as we begin to *slow down*. We're starting to gain clarity and it's becoming more obvious that we want to give priority to the important things in our lives. We're beginning to realize that when this is over, the world is going to be a different place.

The world is shrinking. ~ We're listening to each other. ~ *It's okay if you are feeling a bit weird right now. The reality is, you are discovering who you really are. You're finding out what is valuable to you and we are all beginning to recognize that we have taken certain services for granted.*

Can you *think of a time* when a *grocery clerk* was seen as a first responder? - Every time I walk through the checkout line, I look at that cashier and I thank them for coming in and serving us. Imagine the consequence if they didn't show up.

I watched a live feed from Chilliwack as the RCMP and fire departments drove past the hospital with lights and siren, thanking our medical personnel for putting their health at risk for us. We're *humbled* and gratitude *can't help* but come out. If you are one of our first responders - thank you. How can we be of service to you?

Do you understand that what you are experiencing is a *practical grounding in your life*? It is stripping away the facades. It is bringing clarity about the things that are precious. It is bringing clarity that *we must act responsibly* because *our lives impact other lives*. We've been *saying the* for years. We believe it now.

As I've watched the social boundaries tightening up and watched behaviour, it has become very evident that a significant number of people do not understand what it means to "love your neighbour as yourself." I find myself reacting to the hoarders. I would suggest to you, that it's okay to be angry and frustrated. But *rather than forming opinions* about people, *pause and figure out why* you're reacting.

Survival instincts are being triggered. Fear is an ever present reality and we can swing from feeling fine one moment to feeling vulnerable the next. So Church, hear me when I say, "Take care of yourself. Be gentle with yourself. Because that becomes the foundation upon which you can begin to notice the people around you.

So this morning we are going to look at two passages where Jesus instructs us to "love our neighbour as ourselves." The first is in

Matthew 19:16 ... a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

17 "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments."

18 "Which ones?" he inquired.

Jesus replied, "'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, 19 honour your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbour as yourself.'"

20 "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

The second passage is

Matthew 22:35 an expert in the law, tested Jesus with this question: 36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" 37 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

I said it earlier and I want to reinforce it. We are living in a time of clarity. The things that are important are becoming clear. People who joked about God two months ago are actually *talking about him* now. We are beginning to react to life, not only through our senses (the things we see and touch and smell and hear and taste); we are beginning to sense things on a metaphysical level. Your spirit is becoming aware of things you hadn't prioritized before. This pandemic is awakening us.

Before the pandemic, people had their agendas. They did life in set routines. *All of that* has been turned upside down. Now we are forced into a quieter life and many don't know what to do with the time they have with themselves. I have had people reach out to me whom I have not heard from *in years*. Friends from the past; just wanting to connect.

So as you become more aware of the disruption in your own lives, *be mindful* of the people around you. They may be hurting. They may be fearful. Hear Jesus' words when he says, "The *first place you should go to* is a place where you can be *quiet with God*."

Pause and think about how you express your love for your Creator. ~ "How do I show you I love you God?" "How do I practically rely upon You, *now*?" "When I begin to feel overwhelmed can you teach me to step *towards you* rather than staying in my fear or moving to distractions?" ~ "I want to *love you* with *all* my heart and with *all* my soul and with *all* my mind."

"In you I know I can find a safe place to rest. I can find comfort. In you I can join with others, like we are this morning, and be comforted." ~ Listen church, the things that divide us are diminishing.

And it is from that posture that we begin to rise. We can begin to ask the question, "*Who needs my help?*" And there are times when the right answer to that question is "*you*". *You need to know you are okay*. Allow yourself grace. As you identify the kinds of circumstances that *trigger you*, you can begin to protect yourself from those kinds of experiences. You can begin to discover how God is introducing you to principles that you have not known before. ~ Record them; write them down. *Share the things* you are discovering with others. Don't keep it a secret. That would be *such a squandered opportunity* to bless someone else. ~ You might think you're the only one who feels the way you do, so you may hesitate sharing those places of vulnerability. ~ *Well I want to assure you* that your circumstances and stresses are *not unique to only you*. You will find that others are feeling the *same things*, or at the very least, can identify with what you're feeling. And you trusting them with your fears is honouring them because you are telling them, *you feel safe with them*.

And if people are sharing their anxiety with you, understand that you are fulfilling a *critical ministry* during this time. And by allowing someone to tell their story, you are loving them in a way that you would want to be loved. *Loving your neighbour as yourself*.

As we think about how to apply the principles we are talking about this morning, we have figure out how to make reaching out a whole lot easier.

If you want to be more involved in helping other people and you simply don't know how, we have created an email address for you. help@abbotsfordvineyard.com All you need to do is send an email and say, I want to help. I can buy groceries or supplies and deliver them. I can bake. I've got stuff I can share (tablets, etc for kids who are going into online learning) - Let us know what you can do. Scott MacKenzie is heading up this team of volunteers to be available in our community. I've told Scott that if he needs someone in Chilliwack to pick up and deliver things, call me. If you want to be on Scott's team, let him know.

Some of you might be feeling that you actually *can't do much*. Remember that there are going to be *real costs* as we help people in our community and *we have real people* who can work from home and we *have real expenses* in Abbotsford Vineyard that continue on. One of the great temptations in times of crisis is to hunker down. Yet the great movements of God *often paralleled the times of crisis*. And the *defining factor* was that when things got worse, Christians got activated. We need to understand that as we stand together, we protect each other. If you read Acts 4 this week, and I encourage you to do it (Acts 4 - write it down), you will understand it in a *new light*. It will *make sense to you* in way it didn't make sense before. Our website is the place to stay connected financially.

We are also introducing an additional way to allow our prophetic gifts to thrive. This is a bit different than sharing individual words or dreams that you have received. This is a place where our prophets gather, right now by Zoom, and share what they are hearing. *Together*, they discern what words to pass on to our community. I *love the thought* that we could have a room of prophets listening to Holy Spirit on our behalf; that they will talk about what they are sensing, and *they will decide together* what is applicable for us. If you have a word or dream or vision that you believe God has placed on your heart for our community, *send it to this team*. Let them listen to Holy Spirit *with you* and *discern together* what God is saying to us. To reach them email prophetic@abbotsfordvineyard.com

Why are we doing this? Because each of us are facing the challenge of having our inner feelings come to the surface. We're isolated and we recognize the importance of connecting. As we do, we are going to experience *a deepening in relationship*. That has been one of our goals *for years*. Sunday mornings together are wonderful, but allow me to encourage all of us to cluster together.

Many of us are in home groups. We are encouraging you to *continue to meet*. Make it a high priority. But use Zoom. If you don't know how to set up Zoom contact the office and we will have someone walk you through it. Simply email office@abbotsfordvineyard.com And let us know when you meet together. It helps us figure out where the gaps are. We want to help.

As we were praying together on Friday morning (6:45) an idea came to us. We called it "**Coffee @ AV**" ~ The idea is to use zoom and go out for virtual coffee. Post the Zoom link on our Facebook page and anyone who is free at that time can bring their coffee, click on the link and have coffee with whoever shows up. You are free to do this as often as you like and take advantage by posting the day and time. If no one comes, no big deal. Just realize that *you don't need anyone's permission to go out for coffee*.

So I am inviting anyone who would like to go for coffee this week to meet me at 10:00am on Wednesday morning I'll be waiting for anyone who would like to join me. No agenda. Just checking in with one another. I'll post a Zoom link on Facebook early in the week and all you have to do is click on it Wednesday at 10:00am. If you don't have Zoom on your computer, it is going to be a program you are going to want to add. It makes staying connected Wonderfully real.

One final thing: The Catley's. Everything that can be done is now completed. They are simply waiting for the visa. Once they get it, they plan to cross the border right away while it still is open. That means we are going to need to find a place for them to quarantine; ideally a house. We are also looking for a house for them to live in. And during the transition we'll need a place to store their furniture. So this is *a real need*, please be active in helping us address these logistical issues. If you know of a house for rent (it should have 3 bedrooms), let us know. Help us with the quarantine time.

Sometime in this coming week we are going to be letting you know how to connect for prayer. We want you to be able to have people actually pray with you and you experience them praying for you. If you would like to pray for people use this email address prayer@abbotsfordvineyard.com Right now we are building capacity. We don't have it yet. We will let you know when we have a team together who can pray for you *in real time*. Until then, if you want to be part of the team that prays *for people*, let us know by emailing prayer@abbotsfordvineyard.com