

Facebook posts for community reassurance during Covid-19 Crisis



Day 1 (Saturday, March 14):

Welcome to the pandemic! **OR it is what it is** so let's make the best of it!

From now until the quarantine/lock-down restrictions in our community are listed, I will be posting something each day as a suggestion for making the best of this bad situation. After all, what can it hurt and it might just make you feel better. Here goes:

DAY 1: Come to grips with what is and is not our new reality of living life under certain never before experienced limitations. Make a list for yourself and post it where you will see it every day. I'll get you started:

REALITY CHECK #1 -- You do not need to grocery shop as though you will never see the inside of a store again. The stores will remain open. The shelves will remain stocked, as long as greedy and scared people do **NOT** buy 12 of everything

they might conceivably need. Just buy the one you do need. Leave something for the next person.

REALITY CHECK #2 - This is not a blizzard or a hurricane. The chances of losing water and power is remote. Yet another reason NOT to shop til you drop.

REALITY CHECK #3 - If retail therapy (shopping) is vital to your personal wellbeing (and you know who you are), consider reaching out to a neighbor for whom going out shopping could be virtually impossible due to their own high risk status (such as the elderly or folks in cancer treatment) or because they have little kids they don't want to drag through the store right now. Get their shopping list and have at it. Truly a win - win for everyone. You get to shop, they get to be safe and hold on to their own well-being a little longer.

Get the idea of what I'm doing here?? Good! Add your own ideas to the Comments section. I'll be back with some more "IT IS WHAT IT IS" ideas to see us through.

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Day 2 (Sunday, March 15):

Welcome to Day 2 of IT IS WHAT IT IS SO LET'S MAKE THE BEST OF IT! For those of you new to this post today, it is my attempt to get us through this anxious and challenging time by offering my humble take on coping strategies for everyone interested. So, here are a few REALITY CHECKS for today:

REALITY CHECK #1 - You survived Day 1. Yay you!! It wasn't easy but you did it.

REALITY CHECK #2 - Many of you developed wonderful coping strategies for getting through Day 1. Again, Yay You! I kept my eye on Facebook all day and was impressed with what folks did to keep busy. Spring yard clean-up was a big one. Re-organizing pantries was another. Ranting on Facebook about selfish people in the grocery store was another possible pass-time. Understandable, but really, it's not sustainable as a daily thing. At least I hope it isn't. We'll see. What other things did folks do? What are you planning to do? Share your ideas in the Comments section so we all can get inspired!

REALITY CHECK #3 - A reminder that we need to keep this up for at least two weeks so don't be surprised if your enthusiasm about household chores, etc. as

ways to fill in the time gets old fast. But fear not! (Those are the two words which appear most frequently in the Bible - did you know that?? It's true. But I digress). Fear not, because you do NOT have to spend all your time doing constructive things. Yes, it can be helpful to have time to tackle that long list of "things I'd do if I had more time." We all have one of those lists and now could (notice I said *could*) be a fruitful use of all this time you now have on your hands. But you do not have to do it. Really, you don't. What you do need to do is what fills your heart, eases your mind and renews your soul.

Dear Ones, I am encouraging you to see this two week hiatus from "real life" as an incredible opportunity to hit the reset button for your life. What do you love about your life? What feeds your soul and how often do you allow yourself to do it? What are your true responsibilities and obligations and what do you do just because they have been layered on to your life for years by the expectations of others? Only you can answer these questions and this two week forced break from "real life" is a gift allowing you to think and ponder them. If nothing else, you can give yourself the gift of just asking the questions. You don't have to change anything but at least you know the questions themselves are okay to ask.

Enjoy Day 2! Keep smiling. Stop shopping. Wash your hands. Again...

Warmly, Rev. Ruth

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Day 3 (Monday, March 16):

Welcome to Day 3 of IT IS WHAT IT IS SO LET'S MAKE THE BEST OF IT!

This post is my attempt to get us through this anxious and challenging time by offering my humble take on coping strategies for anyone interested. So, here are a few REALITY CHECKS for today:

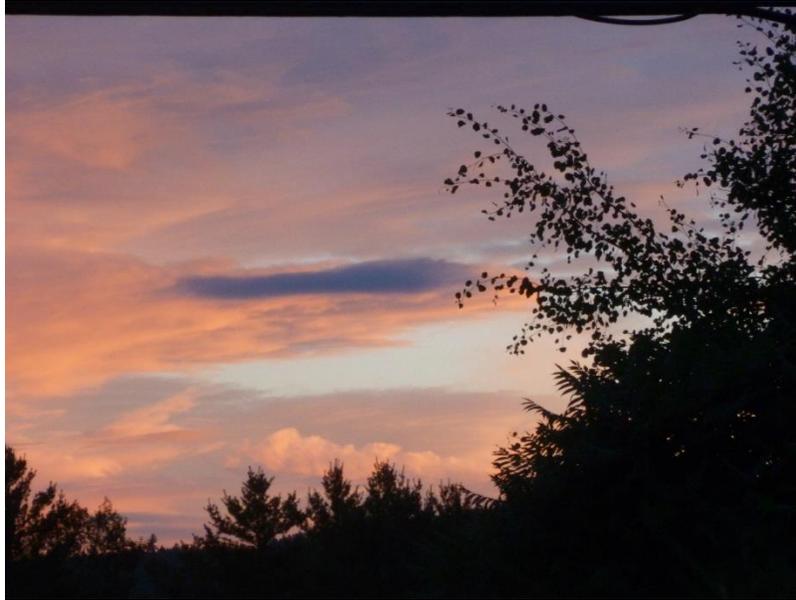
REALITY CHECK #1: You have now made it through two days of the Covid-19 quarantine/lock-down. Yay you!!! You are one day closer to the end of all this.

REALITY CHECK #2: This will be the day when the true reality of the situation begins to set in. If you have kids in the house, you won't be rushing to get them out the door. If you have been told to work at home, or if your place of work is temporarily closed, you won't be rushing out the door either. If you're retired, work or school isn't on your minds but the need to set aside your usual routine is.

All of this is bound to be disconcerting and disorienting. That's okay. Today will be the day to begin establishing *your* way of dealing with this "new normal."

REALITY CHECK #3: This Covid-19 outbreak and its resulting disruptions still bring with it some positive things and a big one is time. Let's face it, we Americans live our lives each day frantically running from one thing to the next. Therefore, time is arguably our most valuable commodity because it is in such short supply. No more. As long as we are being urged to just stay home, only going out for essentials, we are receiving the gift of time. Even if you have been asked to work from home, you're saving commuting time at minimum. Even if you are retired, you now have the time to evaluate how you've been spending those long-awaited retirement days. Even if you have school and college age students now at home for the duration, this time is still a gift, even though I am pretty sure it doesn't feel that way. But it is. This is a unique experience that, God willing, we will never again experience in our lifetimes. For all of us, it is an unprecedented chance to take a good hard look at the way we invest our time each day. Is the way we are investing our time really how we want to be spending it? If not, what needs to change and how do we change it? Here's your chance to really think about that, on your own, as a couple, as a family. Not sure how to get started? Try making a list of what you *would* usually do today if life was its usual chaotic self. Next, make a list of what you *will* do today. Comparing the two may just give you a glimpse of what is really important, and what isn't.

Enjoy Day 3! Keep smiling. Stop shopping. Give someone you're worried about a call. Wash your hands. Again... Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 4 (Tuesday, March 17):

Yet another day to figure out how to deal with this situation in which we are all enmeshed, like it or not. So, here are today's thoughts for IT IS WHAT IT IS SO LET'S MAKE THE BEST OF IT! Yes, this is a new photo today, taken in New Hampshire last summer. A reminder of happy days gone by and still to come, for everyone.

REALITY CHECK #1 - This is day 4 and we are one day closer to the end of all this. But it is very disconcerting to realize that we have no clear idea of just when the end of all this will be nor what it will look like. Yikes! But this does not change the reality that the only way through all this is through it. We can't wish it away. We certainly can't ignore it. We can only endure it the best way we are able and, dear friends, that will change from day to day.

REALITY CHECK #2 - "One day at a time" are some of the wisest words ever spoken. They are the bedrock of 12 step recovery groups and they should form the foundation of how we handle this situation. For those of you more spiritually oriented, remember the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew: "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today." (Matthew 6:34)

REALITY CHECK #3: Take a deep breath and step away from all this for at least an hour every day. Take a walk. Call a friend or family member. Write a letter - an actual letter that requires an envelope and a stamp, not an email or a text. Plant

some seeds and use their growth as a way to mark the passage of this time when life is dramatically altered and yet still goes on. And, if you'd like, please share in the comments to this post how you stepped away from all this today and how it made you feel. We all need some ideas here!

Happy St. Patrick's Day by the way. You can still wear your green if nothing else. Oh, Oh!! - who's making corned beef and cabbage? I have no clue how to make it. Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Stop shopping. Give someone you're worried about a call. Wash your hands. Again...
Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 5 (Wednesday, March 18):

Another day dawns as we make our way through this strange new reality together. Here are today's thoughts for IT IS WHAT IT IS SO LET'S MAKE THE BEST OF IT! Yes, this is a new photo today, taken in New Hampshire last summer. Is this cool or what? It was on the mantle of the fireplace in the living room of the beautiful B&B where we stayed. I remember asking the innkeeper about it and it is a real book! I can't imagine how this was done. Another reminder of happy days gone by and still to come, for everyone.

REALITY CHECK #1: Is it my imagination or do we seem to be settling down a bit? This situation is still nerve-wracking and strange but, judging by what I am seeing on Facebook and hearing in conversations with folks, we are finding our way through this, one day at a time. These beautiful words from the ancient letter to the church in Philippi surely ring true every day: "I can do all things through God who strengthens me." Philippians 4:13

REALITY CHECK #2: I am so very impressed at how folks are really beginning to pull together and find ways of pooling talent and resources to do what still needs to be done even as the world we know seems to be shutting down around us. Be assured that so many folks are working behind the scenes to make sure essential services for those who struggle the most are still being provided. It is also wonderful and so very important that we offer our deep gratitude continually to those on the front lines of this situation: doctors, nurses, medical staff at every level, community first responders like police and firefighters and let's not forget all those folks working tirelessly in the craziness that passes for grocery shopping at the moment. Thank you one and all! We couldn't do any of this without you!

REALITY CHECK #3: One of the things that has warmed my heart the most and reminded me powerfully that, though we all get pretty cranky at times, people are truly good and kind and caring at heart. I heard the story yesterday of the family of a woman from my church celebrating her 100th birthday in spite of the lockdown in the nursing home where she now lives. Her family was all there with balloons and presents and flowers. They waited outside the front door while the nursing staff brought the woman to the door. She stayed behind the glass door while all her family crammed into that little entry foyer inside the exterior door. Then they sang happy birthday as loud as they could and Harriett knew she was not forgotten. Facebook is full of similar stories, one I saw just this morning of a son sitting on a chair outside his dad's window at the nursing home while they visited on the phone. So, my question for you this morning - and I hope you will share with all of us in the comments - what have you witnessed in this strange new reality that gives you hope and a powerful reminder that love carries on even through this bizarre situation? Can't wait to hear YOUR wisdom for us all!

By the way, just to let you all know I will be doing my Thursday Community Office Hours from 2-4pm tomorrow by Facebook Live. You can post questions for me in the comments and I will do my best to respond. Won't be quite the one on one

format but I think we can still have a nice conversation only this time as a community!

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Stop shopping. Give someone you're worried about a call. Wash your hands. Again...

Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 6 (Thursday, March 19):

A dark, cold and rainy morning at my house. If I am honest, the weather matches my mood. I'm betting yours too. But, as we've been talking about for almost a week now, IT IS WHAT IT IS SO LET'S MAKE THE BEST OF IT! Today's photo is of the Peace Pole at our church, installed last October in the upper gardens of our Pollinator Gardens. Seems like an appropriate focal point for this morning as we seek peace for our souls and respite for our world in a reality that at times still seems impossible to comprehend.

REALITY CHECK #1: Guess what? It's still the first day of Spring - even though it's dark and cold and rainy. It's still the first day of Spring - even though this

general upending of life is getting really old really fast. It's still the first day of Spring which reminds us that, indeed, the days on the calendar are slipping by and we are one day closer to the end of all this.

REALITY CHECK #2: I am very impressed with most of what I have seen and heard about as people find ways to engage positively with this new reality. I love all the supportive comments being offered to so many folks who are used to functioning behind the scenes and now find themselves on the front lines of all this. Of course, our doctors and nurses and all hospital staff in so many capacities. Also wonderful to see is how all those unsung heroes of life each day are finally getting their due - grocery store workers, truck drivers, CNAs, dietary workers at local elder care facilities and hospitals. I know my list is woefully inadequate so help me out! Who are the unsung heroes you see helping us through this time? Let's make a list here in the comments section so everyone gets a much deserved shout-out!

REALITY CHECK #3 - I want to acknowledge again just how difficult all of this really is for everyone. My intention with this daily post is not to minimize that at all. This is a really difficult, challenging and scary time for absolutely everyone. So, if you need to back away from social media and the constant news barrage to find rest for your soul, do it. Listen to your body. Listen to your heart. When that internal "gut" anxiety level starts to escalate, back off. Step away. If you can, do something physical that involves total concentration. This is what I did yesterday and it really helped. Plus, my house has not been this clean in a LONG time. Just saying... So, if you emailed me or messaged me yesterday and wondered why I didn't get back to you, that's why. And you know what? I do feel better today, ready to fully engage once more. And even better, I have some new ideas on things we can do as a church and as a community as we make our way through this uncharted territory of life in the midst of Covid-19. Stay tuned!

With this in mind, let me close today with one Bible verse from the Hebrew Scriptures that has guided me all my life: *"The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall rise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in."*
Isaiah 58:11-12

Dear friends - this is us right now, working together to repair this breach and restore our streets to life as we cherish it. Truly we are in this together, with God by our side every moment of every day.

Remember! I'll be doing Community Office Hours via Facebook Live this afternoon starting at 2pm!!! Check in and send me your questions via comment or text message.

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Support a local restaurant with a take-out order and tip well. Give someone you're worried about a call. Wash your hands. Again...

Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 7 (Friday, March 20):

Well, it's officially a week since all this began. We made it a whole week. Yay us! Unfortunately, it is not much clearer this morning than it was a week ago how long we will be dealing with this new reality so our community coping strategies grow ever more important. So, let's move on to today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS SO LET'S MAKE THE BEST OF IT! Today's photo is of a banner which hangs in our Fellowship Hall at UCC Westerly. I'm sharing it as part of this post today because it captures the essence of what we in my church believe church should be. These daily posts are but one of the ways we are working together, along with our

brothers and sisters in other faith traditions and churches, to be the church in the midst of these bizarre times.

REALITY CHECK #1: As I noted at the beginning of this post, it is officially a week since all this began. And look at all that has been accomplished in seven short days as our community comes to grips with this "new normal." The outpouring of support *for each other* through social media, offers of assistance and just plain kindness has been absolutely incredible. Let's keep it up as Week 2 officially kicks off tomorrow.

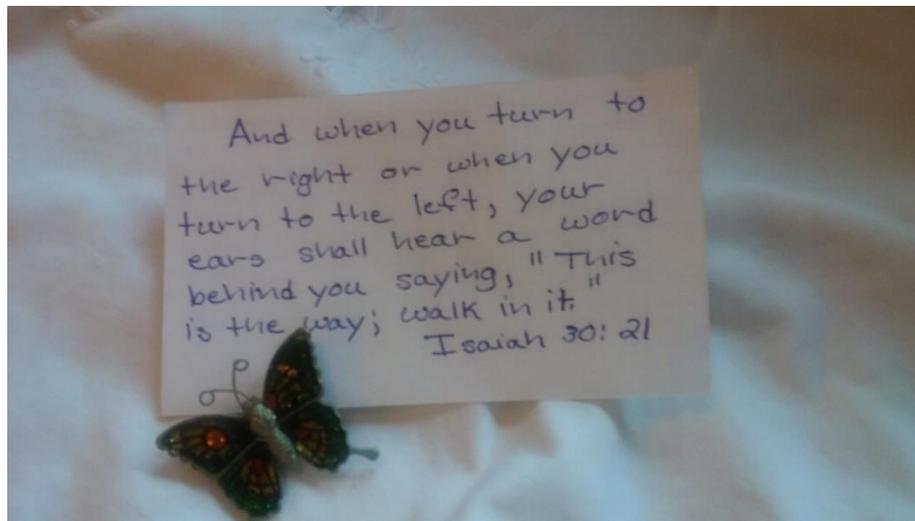
REALITY CHECK #2: I realize many of us are struggling financially as incomes shrink due to lay-offs and plummeting stocks so I know we are not all in a position to support local businesses still open during this time. I'm praying for all of you struggling financially now and I hope you trust that eventually this will get better. BUT for those of you relatively unscathed financially by this situation, you can do something REALLY important and simple. Get take-out meals from local restaurants who are hurting. Tip very, very well. I'm talking 30%. You need to because the drop off in their business has been precipitous. You want to do something to ease suffering in this crisis? Eat out and tip well. How is that for a win-win!

REALITY CHECK #3: Do something truly kind for yourself today. You've earned it. Granted, it is entirely possible that your first and maybe even your second choice for what you would do to be kind to yourself - like a day at a spa - may not be possible right now. So get creative! Take a walk someplace soothing to your soul - the beach, a favorite nature preserve (we've got a ton of them right around us in case you forgot), even your own neighborhood. Enjoy the quiet. Of course, you would need to ditch the ear buds to do that but, trust me, this is a good thing. Embrace the silence. Don't run from it. Instead explore it because - here's the thing - silence is not the absence of sound. Silence is a different kind of sound. It is sacred sound that opens up the space in your heard, your heart and your mind to fully hear life all around you. Listen for the bird song. How many different ones can you detect? Listen for the sound the breeze makes moving through tree branches and tall grasses. Watch for God's reminders that God is still here, walking with us right beside us every moment of every day. Listen for God to whisper in your ear, "Do not fear, I am with you. Do not be afraid for I am your God." Isaiah 41:10. Remember, it's ever so easy to miss God's still, small voice when

daily life drowns it out. But it's still there. It's always been there. God never stopped listening, never stopped caring about you and all those you love.

By the way, thanks to all of you who joined in with me for my Facebook Live Community Office Hours. Some rough spots as I am still figuring all this out but I'll give it a try again next week, from 2-2:30, next Thursday - live from my office. And please join me on Sunday for our abbreviated "gathered and scattered" morning worship at 9:45am, broadcast live from our sanctuary. The "at-home worship" resource will be posted on the church's Facebook page for those who are not part of our email list-serve. If you'd like to join that list-serve, just PM me. A reminder that I will need your email address to add you to an email list-serve. 😊

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Give someone you're worried about a call. Wash your hands. Again...
Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 8 (Saturday, March 21):

Another Saturday during this unexpected and bizarre chapter in all our lives. Reality of this as the temporary new normal for possibly a lot longer than we would want is sinking in. That means it's definitely time to consider today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS SO LET'S MAKE THE BEST OF IT! Today's photo is of a something I couldn't show you in person even if you were able to stop by the church. That's because this is a photo of what is buried at the very center of our labyrinth on the upper church lawn. When creating a labyrinth, tradition holds that you bury something in the center to anchor the labyrinth to the earth and to God.

This was our choice - a butterfly and this verse from Isaiah. The butterfly is a symbol of resurrection and new life always possible. The bible verse reminds us that God is always with us, every step of every day, even when we're not so sure about this whole "God thing." Some thoughts for today:

REALITY CHECK #1: This is getting scary, no doubt about it. The news gets more grim every day. The reality that this will go on for way longer than we had initially hoped is sinking in and it's doing a number on us for sure. We're anxious, fearful, struggling to sleep and worried about what comes next. We can't see the end to all this and that, dear friends, is the real source of the anxiety. So, how do we live each day in this new normal? That is THE question, isn't it. Read on...

REALITY CHECK #2: I thought perhaps a reminder from history might help. Many of us grew up with close family members - grandparents and parents, etc. - who lived through both the Great Depression and World War II. Be honest, all those stories of rationing and not throwing anything away got real old when we heard them over and over again. But, one of the things we forget when we think about this from the perspective of today is that our grandparents, when they were in the midst of it, had NO idea how it would all work out. They struggled daily with the possibility that the harsh realities of the Great Depression would be their reality for the rest of their lives. Hence the washed and reused tin foil, saved balls of twine, etc. that some of us grew up with. Also, during WWII, they did not know as it began how it would turn out. In the midst of that horrible conflict - in 1941, '42, '43 - they DID NOT KNOW if their lives would end under the rule of Imperial Japan or Nazi Germany or some combination thereof. It was a possibility even though they refused to dwell on it. My point today is that THEY DID NOT KNOW THE OUTCOME while they were going through it. Which is why their solution then is the only one which makes sense for us today - we live one day at a time doing the best we can. We pitch in to help our fellow human beings, whatever that might look like for each of us. Simply put, we endure. Hold on to this as a tangible reminder of what will be our future. Someday this will be history but we will remember it always, and hopefully take the lessons we learn from it and use them to become our new best selves. That is the reality of hope in the midst of fear and despair. Hold on tight to it.

REALITY CHECK #3: As you are enduring each day, be kind to yourself. If you need to just stop and step away from everything and everyone, do it and don't feel

guilty. Just for a little while, have the courage to turn off the TV and the computer, maybe even your cell if the constant alerts are making you super anxious. And, be on the alert for something positive you can do and there are many. One is to make phone calls to folks, especially folks you have not spoken with in a while. Write cards to folks you know are struggling. Real mail is always a treasure these days. And, if you like to sew, please know there is a grass roots movement taking hold as I write this of folks sewing re-usable face masks for use in hospitals, nursing homes and for our frail folks at home. If you're interested in joining this group, check out the church's Facebook page @UCC Westerly.

A reminder that I will be leading an abbreviated worship service at 9:45am tomorrow on Facebook Live. The worship resources for the service have been posted on our Facebook page.

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Give someone you're worried about a call. Wash your hands. Again...
Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 9 (Sunday, March 22):

Sunday, the day most of the world's Christians set aside for God. But where is God in the midst of this scary crisis? Something to ponder together for sure and a perfect topic for today's IT IS WHAT IT IS SO LET'S MAKE THE BEST OF IT! Today's photo is one I took myself of the ginormous cross window at our church. It is located just above and behind the altar and is magnificent from the inside

certainly, but also on this night from the outside. I took it as I was heading home after a meeting. The cross was lit because our choir was inside the sanctuary rehearsing as they do every week. It made me smile then as I know how hard they work, how much the church means to them and to our whole congregation. It makes me smile even more now as I see this cross window - our cross window - illuminating our faith for all the world to see. This photo has become a powerful reminder to me that in the midst of ever changing realities, some things never change. God's great love for each and every one of us is one of them. Never forget that even if you don't "believe" in God, God still believes in you.

REALITY CHECK #1: It is now becoming clear that we simply do not know how long this strange new reality of daily life will be with us. It is also undeniable that what we are doing by staying home to flatten the curve of infection is incredibly important. That doesn't mean it isn't difficult, annoying and frustrating because it is surely all of those things. But, this too shall pass, eventually. Until then we all need to pull together in absentia which is itself a bizarre turn of events. But we're doing it. How amazing is that!

REALITY CHECK #2: I am constantly amazed at how folks are really trying to figure out ways to make a difference, to help others in the midst of a reality that requires we limit physical contact. This is truly a challenge to our human ingenuity, and we are rising to that challenge. Two initiatives I am aware is the sewing of reusable face masks by a large and growing group of folks who sew. (Not me. I am fabric impaired as anyone in my congregation will tell you.) This is in direct response to requests from hospitals, elder care facilities, etc. for more facemasks since the supply is woefully inadequate. Patterns and instructions are popping up all over the internet and folks are organizing not only to sew but to gather supplies and make plans for delivery of completed masks. Another is a group of folks willing to volunteer with errands for folks who can't go out themselves. This initiative is being organized by the local Rotary. Yay them! I heard a story yesterday that the Boston Globe is doing the same thing for Boston area residents. Only problem here is that way more folks willing to help than they do requests for help. Now that is something. If you find yourself wondering where God is in the midst of all this, look around at what ordinary folks are doing. That is God's love made tangible the same way it always is - through the actions of people just like you and me.

REALITY CHECK #3: We are in this together and that's a good thing. The American psyche has placed too much value for too long on the "rugged individual,"

where you pulled yourself up by your own bootstraps - whatever the heck that means - refusing to accept any help and scorning those who do. Through the miraculous attitude change that occurs when crisis crushes our usual way of living, as Covid-19 has, we suddenly are rediscovering what it means to be people in community with each other. We are remembering just how important Jesus' instructions to love the other as much as we love ourselves really are.

A reminder that I will be leading an abbreviated worship service from the sanctuary of UCC Westerly in Pawcatuck, CT at 9:45am today on Facebook Live. I can see who is watching - which was rather disconcerting last week but I'm ready for it now - so feel free to post any comments or questions as the service rolls along.

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Give someone you're worried about a call. Wash your hands. Again...
Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 10 (Monday, March 23):

Welcome to Day 10 of our new Covid-19 reality. I've been calling this daily post IT IS WHAT IT IS SO LET'S MAKE THE BEST OF IT and I hope it is helping in some small way for you to do just that.

One of the features of the post has become the photos I use each day to introduce it, each one a little different. Today's photo is one taken during a family

vacation in the Enfield, NH area a few years ago. It is of a statue undergoing renovation at the Saint-Gaudens National Historic Park. Augustus Saint-Gaudens was and remains one of the most famous American sculptors of the 19th century. He specialized in Civil War statues and this famous bust of Lincoln is a preliminary model of one of them. As I was scrolling through my photos, I came across this one and it seems to me to capture perfectly how we are feeling right about now - trapped in a cage with bubble gum dripping off us because our lives are just totally gummed up. I'd love to know your thought on this photo if you'd care to post them in the comments below. Up to you!

REALITY CHECK #1: Yes, we've been going through this for 10 days but the reality is that no end is in sight and all the experts are telling us things will get worse before they get better. Scary, scary stuff. But, we know what to do to remain as safe as possible - stay home, keep your distance from folks if you must go out, wash your hands often and well. Most importantly, if you feel ill **CALL** for medical assistance first. **DO NOT GO INTO CLINICS OR ER's OR DOCTOR'S OFFICES** without being told by a health professional to do so. Difficult to do, I know, but critically important.

REALITY CHECK #2: As I have written about several times already, this situation is unlike anything we have been through before so there is no playbook for how to cope. Also, because the daily realities of this crisis are shifting rapidly, our coping strategies need to shift too. That being said, a surprisingly effective way to cope is to write out a daily schedule for your family. Perhaps you do this already as a family. Yay you. But, if you have not dramatically adjusted that schedule in the light of the Covid-19 reality, you should do so now. Today. Map out a general schedule for the whole family beginning with wake-up times and a new morning routine. Identify "office space" if you are working from home where you can spread out and "nest" as you need to. Identify a school space where the kids can congregate to do school work. Perhaps these two realities - work and school from home - can overlap if your kids are old enough. If not, adjust your schedule and share responsibilities with any other adults in the household as you are able for school oversight of your little ones. Perhaps a grandparent can even keep an eye on the kids via FaceTime, if you have that capability. Get creative! For yourself, set aside a realistic time when you can work knowing that it may be at a time completely different than you are used to - like very early in the morning or after the kids are settled down for the evening. Be sure your family schedule - and by the way, I define "family" in the broadest possible terms - has plenty of built-in

downtime for being outside and getting some fresh air, maintaining social distance of course. Consider establishing a family game time or family art time. Some families are even experimenting with cooking together. The possibilities are endless. The key to keeping your sanity, though, will be to have a set plan - a schedule - for how each day will unfold. This is not the time when a relaxed, unstructured approach to life each day will serve you well and I say this as someone who prefers a relaxed approach to life. If this is just not you, try to do it anyway in some fashion, knowing that this is only temporary!! This is not a forever change. But it is a necessary one right now, like it or not.

REALITY CHECK #3: Physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being for each of us is truly critical right now. Build into life each day something that addresses each of these needs. Take a walk, regardless of the weather. Read a book or engage in an activity that requires your brain to fully engage. Turn OFF the television, especially the news, and keep your media exposure to a minimum - just what you need to watch to keep informed about the situation. Connect with folks via social media like Facebook, but limit this time as well so that all those upsetting posts some people like to share do not upend your efforts at remaining calm. And, of course, dare to make God part of your daily reality during this situation. For some of you this is already part of who you are to one degree or another but for others this will be all new ground. Welcome to the seeker's journey for finding meaning in the midst of chaos. And as you engage in this part of life each day, dare to keep in mind God's reassuring presence for each of us. Consider this slightly amended wording of a portion of Psalm 23: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of Covid-19, I fear no evil; for you are with me ... You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows ... I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long." May it be so for you this day and all those you love, wherever they are.

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Give someone you're worried about a call.
Wash your hands. Again...
Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 11 (Tuesday, March 24):

Welcome to Day 11 of our journey through the valley of Covid-19, to quote myself from yesterday. 😊 I've been calling this daily post IT IS WHAT IT IS SO LET'S MAKE THE BEST OF IT and I hope it is helping in some small way for you to do just that. I do want to admit that yesterday's post was a little longer than what I intend to write each day. It happens sometimes with writing but I'll try rein in my muse a bit today...

Today's photo is also from a summer vacation trip, this one to Arcadia National Park in Maine several summers ago. We were blessed to be there for almost a week and on one of those days there was a sudden thunder storm with torrential rain. It lasted an hour or so and then the sun came out. Anxious to continue our explorations of the park, we immediately piled into the car and just began to drive through the park, no particular destination in mind. We soon realized something extraordinary was happening as we drove past waterfall after waterfall where the day before there had been only forest. What we learned is that the rainwater from the storm was still finding its way back down the mountain, even though the storm had ended more than an hour earlier, a very new experience for us city folks. The sound of the rushing water was incredible, thundering and splashing, as though God's own self was playing in the water as it ran down the mountainside. I wanted to share it today as a reminder that what we are living through now will pass. We don't know when precisely, but it will pass. And we will rush back into life with the joy of these heavenly waters running down the mountainside after a storm. May God be with us all on the journey.

REALITY CHECK #1: I never thought I would be grateful for car commercials but I am. If you were watching television last night, and paid attention to the car commercials, you will quickly learn that all the major auto manufacturers now have solid plans in place to boost their business during this scary time AND help folks out who are making car payments already or need to buy a car. Most of them are offering some sort of deferred payment plan. Others are running commercials saying that if you are having difficulty making your payments because of a Covid-19 related lay-off, they want to help. Who knew? With God all things are indeed possible - providing a first glimpse of life beyond Covid-19 through car commercials.

REALITY CHECK #2: I took my own advice from yesterday and created a loose schedule for myself and it really did help keep me from overdoing it and it did keep my anxiety in check. If you are attempting to do the same, a reminder to think of any schedule you create as an anchor to keep your life from flying off helter-skelter. It should not be yet another source of anxiety by hyper-focusing on what you "should" be doing at any given time. Not the point!

REALITY CHECK #3: Looking for something to do? You should have received your 2020 Census form in the mail by now and this is something vitally important for every single one of us to complete. Best of all, Covid-19 won't stop you from doing it because You CAN do it online and it promises to be simple. Here's hoping. The Census is crucial for everyone because it determines everything from representation in Congress to government financial efforts for each community at both the federal and state level. So, here's your chance! Do something important with your downtime. Fill out your Census form online TODAY!

AN INVITATION TO A NEW FACEBOOK LIVE EVENT I will be offering on Wednesday afternoons at 4:30pm beginning tomorrow, March 25. I will be leading us through a variety of spiritual practices, one each week, through a series of virtual mini-retreats which should last roughly 30 minutes each. The series is called "Practicing the Presence of God" and it will be a sort of "spiritual practices 101." Everyone welcome!

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Day 12 (Wednesday, March 25):

Welcome to Day 12 of one of the most bizarre experiences of our collective lives. This daily post entitled IT IS WHAT IT IS is my attempt to offer some simple daily words of hope and encouragement. I hope it is helping in some small way.

Today's photo falls into the category of "you can't make this stuff up" or, as I like to think of it, "God is paying attention." Yes, this is a smiley face of coffee on a saucer. No, I did not somehow create it with my finger. It created itself, or God painted it with God's finger. Depends on your perspective, I guess. This smiley face of hope was created, believe it or not, when my Shih Tzu enjoyed her morning teaspoon-full of my coffee in a saucer. Yes, I know she is spoiled. Not my point. She finished her coffee, jumped down from her usual perch on the seat beside me (she's there now as I write this) leaving this behind. I didn't notice it until later when I went to clean up the dishes. In that instant, I knew it was a smile direct to me from God. Now I share that smile with you. I hope you carry it with you through whatever this day holds. Now, a few more brief thoughts...

REALITY CHECK #1: Just as we are getting particularly antsy with all this, the medical experts are telling us the pandemic will get worse before it gets better right here in our own communities. Not what we want to hear but true nonetheless. So, what does that mean for each of us? Keep up the extreme social distancing. Keep washing your hands. Keep living your lives as best as you are able to each day.

Walk away from the news and social media when you need to. Get a little fresh air. Most importantly, know that every day that passes brings us one day closer to the end of all this.

REALITY CHECK #2: I was very excited yesterday and again this morning to encounter little snippets of conversation about what it will be like when this IS all over. My son mentioned that his workplace, an elder care facility, is planning a big celebration party for all the staff. Universities may be cancelling commencement activities but many are also planning alternative celebrations at a later date. Dear friends, there will be life after all this is safely behind us and it will be glorious indeed because we will have a uniquely new and fresh appreciation for just how wonderful life is in all its simplicity and mundaneness. Thanks be to God. And, we are truly one day closer to that longed for day.

REALITY CHECK #3: I am also so incredibly impressed by all that folks are doing to reach out to make a difference for others for whom this situation is especially fearful: people living alone, people who are the frail elderly, people who are immuno-compromised. Dear friends, this is the very definition of community and we are rediscovering it in wonderful, life-altering ways that I pray will remain with us for the days when this experience is long behind us.

For those who might be interested, I am offering a series of Facebook Live mini-retreats on the subject of practicing the presence of God beginning today. The first session will be this afternoon @ 4:30pm and will last approximately 30 minutes. Today I will be offering an introduction to the concept of spiritual practices and offering some beginning instructions for anyone interested,

Finally, an invitation to those of you living in the Stonington, CT/Westerly, RI area to participate in a local initiative being coordinated by the Missions Board of my church for sewing much needed face masks. These will be given to small local elder care facilities as well as the frail elderly and immune-compromised folks still living at home. For details, please check out the church's Facebook page @ UCC Westerly. If you know of anyone who needs one of our Facemasks, please PM me.

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Day 13 (Wednesday, March 26):

Good morning and welcome to the first day of the rest of your life. It also happens to be Day 13 of our joint efforts to slow the spread of the dangerous Covid-19 virus through the simple act of staying at home. This whole "extreme social distancing" as a medical intervention is proving way more difficult to do than we might have hoped or thought it would be. But, IT IS WHAT IT IS. Here are some thoughts for today.

First, today's photo. This is the view I have every day as I write this from my kitchen. The only thing that changes, really, is the time of day outside my windows. Usually I am up early and writing before the sun comes up, darkness still enveloping my neighborhood making my kitchen/office feel all the more cozy and safe. I also have the joy of seeing the sunrise simply by looking to my right to the windows in my living room. I am richly blessed.

REALITY CHECK #1: Like many of you, I have been reading a lot of things online, Facebook posts, newspaper and magazine articles, etc. To be honest, few of them are all that inspiring or helpful. In fact, some are downright alarming. I am trying to do a better job of managing what I read from these sources and listen to on television. On the days I am more attentive to this, I feel better. I'm betting you find this to be true too. Let's promise each other to be attentive to our limits for such perusing and reading today. After you read this, of course! 😊

REALITY CHECK #2: I am feeling the impact of this radical re-orienting of my life in surprising ways and am wondering if the same is true for you. For one thing,

time is becoming very resistant to my attempts to keep track of it. Several times during the day, I have to stop and remind myself what time it is, even what day it is. I am also struggling to hold boundaries between "work time" and "off time." I had not realized until this week how much I was oriented to connecting "work time" to the physical space of the church where I pastor. I also am finding it very challenging to keep track of the many virtual and on-line meetings I am supposed to be attending. Since I am not physically going someplace, I just get so engrossed in what I am working on in the moment that I forget. Just yesterday I forgot to pick up my son from work AND I totally screwed up the time I was leading a Facebook Live event - a virtual mini-retreat called "Practicing the Presence of God." I went live at 4pm instead of 4:30, wondering the whole time why no one was tuning in. Folks, this is NOT me. In my life in the business world before entering ministry, I was a time management trainer. Managing the use of time was literally my job. How bizarre to consider that this skill that has come so naturally to me all my life is now more elusive than I ever thought possible. Is that happening to you? I'd love to hear about it, if you care to comment.

REALITY CHECK #3: Even as life is totally upended and disorienting for us, it is also at the same time sweeter somehow. People are making an effort to stay in touch with their dear ones. Prayer and all the ways of connecting with God are being rediscovered. New ways of being in community without being physically together are being born every day right before our eyes. Initiatives for helping out in the middle of this crisis are multiplying every day, just like the virus. Faster perhaps. And that's a very, very good and positive thing. These positive moments all around us are what we need to pay attention to right now because they remind us that most people are basically good and kind. Let's hold on to that truth together as we make our way forward, one day at a time.

REMINDER: I will be doing another Facebook Live event at 2pm today - my Virtual Community Office Hours. My plan is to have a conversation, via my talking and you commenting, on the topic of "how are you coping with all this?" And I WILL do this one at the right time! Geesh...

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Day 14 (Friday, March 27):

Good morning and welcome to another day in our Covid-19 reality. It is officially two weeks since our radically revised life grounded in extreme social distancing began. Unfortunately, no real end is in sight as infection rates climb and people are critically ill and dying. Yet another reminder that IT IS WHAT IT IS and all we can do is our best to cope. Here are some thoughts for today.

Today's photo is another one from our vacation collection. This is one of my favorites, taken from a sunset cruise in Hyannis harbor. This is a view of the little chapel at the top of the hill above the Kennedy compound. I love it because the spectacular light of the sunset is reflecting through the windows of the chapel from the other side, a visible reminder that God shines through the church. It is not held within the church. Nor is it the work of human hands that creates such a brilliant moment. God does that. We mere mortals are just called to witness and work as God's hands and feet in the world filled with God's beloved people and creatures of every sort. May we be up to the task at this critical moment.

REALITY CHECK #1: Life does go on, even in this most bizarre of circumstances. The sun rises and sets, even if it is occasionally obscured by clouds and rain and fog. People wake up, pass the time (see Reality Check #2) in all sorts of ways, and then go to bed. Meals are made and cleaned up after. Dogs are walked, sometimes

way more than they're used to, cats itch to go outside, lizards still bask in the light, birds still sing as the sun hides behind the pre-dawn horizon. Life goes on ... and will continue to.

REALITY CHECK #2: Near as I can figure, as we endure this lock-down or stay-at-home situation - whatever you want to call it - we fall into a few basic categories. First are the folks fortunate enough to be able to work remotely who by this point have spent way too much time on conference calls and Zoom meetings. Second are the folks steadfast in their reluctance to engage in any kind of techy ability to connect with the outside world, relying instead on jigsaw puzzles, books, good old-fashioned phone calls and kind words from neighbors and family to pass the time. Then of course we have the parents attempting to home-school their children with the assistance of teachers now magically transformed into tech experts of instruction. These people - children, parents and teachers - especially need our prayers. Let's face it, we all need prayers but no one more than the doctors, nurses, CNA's, med techs, cleaning staff, dietary folks and others at our local hospitals on the front lines of this crisis, literally putting their own lives on the line. Hold them especially in thought and prayer this day.

REALITY CHECK #3: I am amazed and encouraged by the goodness emerging all around us as people make sure folks who shouldn't be out in the midst of the pandemic aren't. A nice thing to do, and let's not forget this means these angels of kindness are upping their own risk for infection by running errands for others. To all of you doing this, thank you for your your generous spirits and your willingness to put your own good health to work for someone more fragile. This is exactly what is getting all of us through, one day at a time. Kudos as well to the Missions folks of my own church - UCC Westerly in Pawcatuck, CT - who are organizing a local effort to sew face masks for local elder care communities as well as frail elders and immune-compromised folks of any age. This effort is going well in terms of materials being donated for kits to sew facemasks. BUT, we need more folks to sew! If you can help, please PM me and I will put you in touch with the coordinator of this project.

REMINDER: Once again this Sunday I will be offering a Facebook Live worship experience @ 9:45am. The "Worship At Home" resource I will be using for the service will be available on the church's Facebook page prior to worship, as well as on the website. If you are not sure how to access the worship livestream on Sunday morning, go to the church's Facebook page www.uccwesterly.org and use the

Facebook link to get to the church's homepage. You will find the worship plan and be all set for the broadcast. Hope you can join us! I promise it's unlike any other service you'll see on Facebook!!

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Day 15 (Saturday, March 28):

Good morning and welcome to a spring Saturday right in the midst of the Valley of Covid-19. Our grappling with living out extreme social distancing continues and is wearing thin but it is clear that, at least for the time being, the situation will get worse before it gets better. But, it will get better. We just need to exercise our patience muscles which is getting more difficult every day. Yet another reminder that IT IS WHAT IT IS and all we can do is take one day at a time. Here are some thoughts for today.

First, today's photo. I took this one myself just after dawn this morning, leaning out the open front window of my living room. Now THAT would have been a funny photo had anyone been around to take it! But I digress. Obviously, this is a photo of a forsythia bush, planted shortly after we moved into our home 16 years ago. I've always loved forsythia and envisioned a big healthy bush emerging as the years passed. Well, that worked for a few years with the bush growing exponentially. In

fact, it grew so much that I started hacking it back in the middle of every summer. For the next several springs, I noticed my beautiful forsythia had almost no blossoms. Plenty of gorgeous green that was home to all sorts of birds and wildlife, but almost no blossoms as spring rolled around every year. I was confused and frustrated. I thought I understood how to take care of all sorts of plants and shrubs because my mom's family had been in the greenhouse business for years. I was convinced it was in my blood! I definitely had a green thumb for heaven's sake! But my naked forsythia bush finally forced me to google "pruning forsythia" which is when I learned that the only time one prunes forsythia is immediately after it blooms. Sigh. My mid-summer hacking had created the problem I was lamenting over. So, last spring I spent an entire day hacking and pruning the forsythia as the few fallen and spent blossoms of last spring lay on the ground. And you see the result. The bush is gorgeous this year and blossoms are still coming. Who knew...

REALITY CHECK #1: It occurs to me that our dealing with our new Covid-19 reality is not unlike my handling of our forsythia bush. I thought I understood the best way to handle the situation. I was convinced my instincts were enough. They weren't. I almost killed the thing I loved by following my instincts. This is exactly what we are doing when we are tempted to redefine in our own terms the radical social distancing we are being asked to live within in our temporarily altered universe. It's okay, we think, to go for a walk on the beach or the bike path even though it's already crowded because we're outside. It's okay, to linger in the grocery store because it feels so great just to be out. And, really, do I have to stay in those demarcated lines to check out? Dear friends, those are your instincts telling you to do things that in this reality are NOT okay. Take care when you decide your own "little voice" knows best these days because most likely, that little voice is wrong.

REALITY CHECK #2: In the cause of transparency, please know that my "little voice" is at this very moment urging me to jump in the car and drive up to see my daughter and her family. I miss them desperately. My daughter and I keep each other grounded and lately FaceTime just isn't cutting it from the emotional standpoint. My little voice is urging me to just hop in the car. But I won't because I can't. Truth is none of us can afford to give in to our little voices right now when their advice is understandable but wrong. It does matter whether or not we hold the line with radical social distancing. Lives depend on it, literally.

REALITY CHECK #3: Falling into the category of things I never thought I'd see but I am because of Covid-19, I thought you might be interested in what I encountered in my drive home from being at the church yesterday. (I go down once a week to take care of things I can only do on-site.) On 95 North there were not one but 2 checkpoints staffed by the RI State Police and the RI National Guard - one between Exits 2 & 3 and one between Exits 4 & 5. They were literally stopping all cars with NY license plates. I am guessing this was to tell these folks quite directly they were welcome to visit but once they arrived at their destination, they needed to self-quarantine for 14 days. So, hopefully, they already had groceries and supplies. I also saw RI State Police pull over a guy in a pick-up truck with NY plates as he was driving through Westerly on Route 1, looking like he didn't have a care in the world. I am thinking these NY folks listened to their little voices that told them to get out of NY to the relative safety we enjoy here. Understandable certainly. But also selfish, definitely. My, my how the world has changed in just 2 weeks.

REMINDER: I will be broadcasting UCC Westerly's Sunday morning worship, an abbreviated version, on Facebook Live at 9:45am tomorrow and all are welcome to join. I will be broadcasting from my home, at the urging of the Deacons of our church. So, that should be interesting! By the way, I learned this week that you do not have to be Facebook users to watch the service. Just go to our website, www.uccwesterly.org and on the homepage you will see a link to Facebook. Click on that link and it will take you directly to the church's page which is where the broadcast is based.

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Day 16 (Sunday, March 29):

Good morning and welcome to the Sabbath Day, for most of us in the Christian tradition. It seems everything in our lives is temporarily changing as we struggle with the ever shifting realities of Covid-19, even religious traditions like "church on Sunday morning." It seems nothing is sacred in the Valley of Covid-19, or is it? Food for thought this day as the contours of extreme social distancing shift yet again. With that, here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

Today's photo will be familiar to the folks of my church, the United Congregational Church of Westerly (in Pawcatuck), United Church of Christ. I took it just last week. I thought today would be a good day to share this photo of our empty sanctuary as churches in most of our communities will be empty today when they are usually bustling with joy as God's people come together to rediscover and remind each other who and whose they are. A funny thing about the churches and

synagogues in cities and towns all across this country. We know there are people who attend, and people who don't. That's obvious. What we seldom stop to think about is all the people who, even though they are not affiliated with nor do they attend worship on Sundays, still find comfort in knowing there are those of us who do. These folks who spend the Sabbath elsewhere may or may not believe in God. Yet, they still find solace for reasons they probably can't even articulate in knowing that there are those of us who do believe and do go. So, even for these folks, perhaps especially for these folks, knowing even churches are closed right now is especially unnerving. Funny thing is, those of us who are in those churches on Sunday mornings know that, while we'd rather be together as usual this morning, church is not about the building or the rituals and traditions of worship. Church is and has always been about the people of God coming together as the people of God to deepen our understand of who it is God needs us to be in the moment, and how our faith informs the ways in which we respond to this and really any crisis, personal or community-wide. In other words, our building is empty physically but not spiritually because in our hearts we are still the church whether scattered or gathered. And right now, that's a pretty wonderful thing.

REALITY CHECK #1: The predicted course of this situation, with Covid-19 cases and the resulting deaths of the spreading infection, are getting worse. So, this morning it feels even more real, even more threatening than it did a week ago, if that's possible. But these statistics do not change the reality that each day endured brings us one day closer to the end of all this, to the end of sequestering or quarantining or whatever you want to call it. We truly are one day closer to the end of this bizarre experience. Hold on tight to this fact when those feelings of being overwhelmed wash over you like the waves pounding your favorite beach during a storm. We have endured all those storms, in spite of the damage and havoc they create, and we will endure this too.

REALITY CHECK #2: At my church, we are doing several things to occupy our minds and hearts while we are enduring (see above). One is that we are organizing folks in the church and community to assist us in sewing face masks for small elder care facilities as well as fragile and immune-compromised individuals in the community who will be at the bottom of any government distribution lists to receive these masks. Details on this project are available elsewhere on Facebook. Second, we have a group of folks who have been charged with planning a church-wide celebration when we ARE able to gather as a family of faith once again. This we are doing as an act of faith and trust that this Valley of Covid-19 will not last

forever. Perhaps planning such a gathering for your workplace and/or your family and friends might be a fun way to occupy your thoughts now and then.

REALITY CHECK #3: I am keenly aware this morning, as I have been every morning, of the folks who are literally on the front lines of this crisis. Certainly doctors and nurses and medical staff at every level, but let's not forget all the ancillary folks on the front lines too. These would be the cleaning staff and the dietary folks at hospitals and elder care facilities. These would be the cashiers and stock people and cleaning people at the grocery stores and pharmacies where we are still allowed to go to get what we need. These would include the truck drivers who make the deliveries to these places and the folks on the other end, producing the things going on the trucks and loading them. These would include the folks working at gas stations to make sure those trucks have diesel to make their runs and clean, safe rest areas to stop at when those runs are long. These would include all the first responders - police, firefighters, EMT's - literally on the front lines in more ways than we even know. All of these folks need to remain close in our thoughts and, for those so inclined, constantly in our prayers. And even if you are not someone inclined to pray usually, now is the perfect time to give it a try. What do you have to lose? You may just discover you have a whole lot to gain.

A reminder I will be leading worship this morning at 9:45am on Facebook Live. A first for me since I will NOT be at the church but instead broadcasting from my kitchen. Now this should be interesting...

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Day 17 (Monday, March 30):

Good morning and welcome to Monday, our third here in the Valley of Covid-19. One of the things I am increasingly aware of is how quickly this total upending of our lives happened and, as a result, how much unfinished business we had to walk away from, personally and professionally. This seems worthy of deeper consideration. With that, here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

Today's photo is of the desk in the study Peter and I share here at home. This is where the desktop computer and the printer are located along with books upon books upon books, all of them mine. Peter is not really a book guy, despite having multiple advanced degrees and credentials. I took this photo just a few minutes ago and those of you who have been to my office at the church will notice one thing right away. The study is a mess. THAT is really unusual for me as I can only work in shall we say a tidy environment. But, last week and the week before were so crazy busy, so frenetic in so many ways that when I decided I needed to call it quits on Friday evening, I just walked away from the mess in the study. I never walk away from mess. As I was contemplating re-engaging with this pile of unfinished work this morning, it occurred to me that many of you are also dealing with lots and lots of unfinished business, personally and professionally. As we are invited to work from home, those of us in professions that allow for that are suddenly realizing what we don't have at home to do the work we need to do. We don't have it because it's sitting in our now empty and forlorn offices, along with

the half empty mug of coffee growing mold because we were planning to rinse it out then next day. Those of us now out of work because of the stay-at-home orders also struggle with the unfinished business of missing our customers and co-workers even as we worry incessantly about financial repercussions of all this. And let's not forget about all those seemingly little personal decisions we made before this stay at home order changed everything - those visits to family and friends not made because we thought, "I'll do it tomorrow" and now we just don't know when that tomorrow will be. So, our challenge now is not to be dragged down by all this unfinished business. The challenge now is to use it as an anchor to hold us steady and strong as the winds of the Covid-19 storm buffet us from every direction. Our unfinished business is now the compass pointing us forward toward the new reality awaiting us beyond the Valley of Covid-19. And we will get there... It's only a matter of time and, unlike toilet paper, that we have in abundance.

REALITY CHECK #1: Once again the daily reminder that, however long all this lasts, we are one day closer to the new life awaiting us at the end of this. In fact, this experience gives a whole new and deeper meaning to the phrase "one day at a time" which is the bedrock of 12 step recovery groups. Reframed just a bit, all you need to deal with is today. Just today. And at the end of today you will be one day closer to the end of all this. Guaranteed.

REALITY CHECK #2: We are literally "building this plane as we are flying it" because NO ONE has been through anything like this before. So, it goes without staying that the situation evolves daily, sometimes hourly. We long for definitive answers about so many things, but those answers just aren't there. But, dear ones, God is. Check out this wonderful story about the Hebrew prophet, Elijah in 1 Kings, chapter 19. That's where you'll find this incredible verse: "... but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire, a sound of sheer silence." That sheer silence was where Elijah encountered God, the silence that undergirds and permeates everything, even in the noisiest, scariest moments. Dear ones, that's where we will encounter God too, if we dare to listen beyond the noise of life and the struggles of the Valley of -- Covid-19.

REALITY CHECK #3: The best antidote to anxiety and worry that seems to stalk us every moment these days is to do something nice for someone else. Make a call, send a card or note, sew a face mask. Just get out of your own head for a moment

to do something for someone else. Then, take a deep breath and do something kind for yourself, like turning off the TV or taking a hot shower or You'll feel better.

A reminder you can join me for a Facebook Live virtual mini-retreat on practicing the presence of God, Wednesday, April 1 @ 4:30pm. This week we'll be talking about journaling.

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Day 18 (Tuesday, March 31):

Good morning and welcome to Tuesday of Week 3 as our sojourn in the Valley of Covid-19 continues. With every passing day the news about how Covid-19 is living

up to its hype becomes more dire. It's definitely getting pretty scary, and yet rays of hope and sunshine peek through the overcast in our skies and our hearts as long as we remember to look for them. With that, here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

We begin as always with today's photo. It's a candle burning, set on my kitchen table, taken just this morning. The background is busy, something any good photographer would find a way to minimize. But I am the most amateur of amateur photographers so this literally is what it is. Actually, the busy background is key to seeing this burning candle as emblematic of the bright light of hope and the promise of better days to come. This candle is lighting the way for all of us in the midst of our upended, chaotic lives permeated by confusion and fear in this Valley of Covid 19. Truth is, this is not a new story even though it very much feels that way for us. Stories abound in the bible of the light of God guiding God's people through the most dire of circumstances. In the Hebrew Scriptures, a pillar of flame guided the Israelites by night on their journey of escape from the Pharaoh in Egypt. In the Christian Scriptures, Jesus is described in John's Gospel as the "light that shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it." Dear ones, I encourage you on this day to look for God's light breaking through the darkness to guide YOU forward. I promise, it's there.

REALITY CHECK #1: This is all getting pretty scary as death tolls rise right here in our home states and hospitals decry the shortages of critical supplies. Death toll rates of 100,000 - 200,000 in the US as a best outcome to this pandemic seem ludicrous, but they are all too real and becoming more real with every passing day. And yet, dear ones, hope still abounds. Kindness and goodness still abound. A new day is coming and a new life awaits us at the end of our painful journey through the Valley of Covid 19. We are all making this journey together. We are all part of the solution for getting through it and we will all be part of the solution to what life will be like on the other side of this.

REALITY CHECK #2: Yesterday I read an article in one of the major news publications which was not helpful. Somebody thought it would be wonderful to invite science fiction writers and "futurists" to write about how they imagine life will be changed when all this is over. NOT a good idea in my opinion since a common theme was of a dystopian (nightmare) situation dominated by fears of re-infection and folks literally afraid to come back out into a world decimated by raging illness and collapsed economies. I am sure these folks enjoyed being asked to let their

imaginations run amok but this was NOT a helpful exercise in journalistic creativity, at least to me. Never a fan of dystopian novels or movies, I found this article to be particularly unhelpful because, for the most part, the authors who wrote about the future only wrote about continuing darkness and fear. I do not think this will be our reality at all! I don't think you do either. So, here is your chance to be your own "futurist!" I am inviting you in the comments here to share with us your visions of the positive outcomes you expect to come out of this total reset of our society. What good do you see coming in the days ahead? What will be the lessons learned from all this which will make our community, our society and our world better for having survived a catastrophe of this magnitude? Seriously, I want to know what you think and I'm betting others do too. Give it a try...

REALITY CHECK #3: I would like to indulge here in a "point of personal privilege" as the author of this daily post to thank all of you who are reading this each day. I appreciate so much your words of encouragement and gratitude for my humble efforts here. And, if you do find this helpful, please share it with anyone and everyone in your friends list. Any gift I have for writing comes from God and it means more to me than you know to feel like my words have some small part in helping folks make it through our bizarre new world each day.

A REMINDER that tomorrow, Wednesday, April 1, @ 4:30pm I will be offering a Facebook Live mini-retreat on the basics of spiritual practice for anyone who is interested. Think of it as exploring all the many, many ways to connect with God, now and in the future. Hope you can join me.

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Do something kind for someone else, and yourself. Wash your hands. Again...
Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 19 (Wednesday, April 1, 2020):

Good morning and welcome to Wednesday of Week 3 as our unplanned and seemingly unending journey through the Valley of Covid-19 continues. Yikes! Enough already! But that is not to be for a while so cope we must. I think that's why I find myself wondering whether or not it will even register with folks that it's April 1st - April Fools Day. I don't know about you but I'm thinking we need a little silly and foolish right about now. Keeping that in mind, here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

First, the photo. This is a painting on cork I did in school as a child when I was maybe 8. It is like so many of my drawings of childhood featuring a cat, because I couldn't have one. Our German Shepherd didn't like cats. Enough said. It also features a house in the background with smoke coming out of the chimney - another common theme of my childhood art - as well as some sort of fruit tree. So, what does this drawing have to do with April Fools Day? Notice how the fruit is sort of unrecognizable - maybe it's apples but you're not quite sure? Well, that is an April Fools Day clue. My brother has always hated raisins and I have never liked cherries, primarily because of him, but that's a story for another day. Anyhow, on April 1st when I was small and Bill was still living at home, we would spend most of the day trying to trick the other one into eating the food they most

despised. Okay, okay, maybe it's not that funny now, but when we were kids, it was hysterical. The tricks we pulled to try to get the other to eat the most despised fruit made us laugh once discovered and had the added benefit of driving my mom crazy. Hey, we were kids. So, today, my invitation to you is to look for the silly in your day today. Remember the silly, the April Fools Day practical jokes that you played on others as well as the ones played on you. We need some smiles right about now so TAG - YOU'RE IT!

REALITY CHECK #1: The news is getting scarier by the day as Covid-19 creeps ever closer to us, right where we live. It's threatening the people we love. It's upending the economy along with our daily lives. Yes, all that is true. But do not let this be the reality that dominates your life today. Turn off the news. Stop checking your phone for updates. Trust me, the information you need will get to you. It is not wise or necessary to go digging for it. Instead, focus on finding the happy and the silly in your day today. It's there! You've just not been looking for it. Time to start...

REALITY CHECK #2: Truly the best way to get through this is to keep busy. One option is to do something for someone else. Make some calls. Write some notes. This might also be an ideal time to tackle one of those projects we all have around the house - like combing through decades worth of family photos and putting them in albums or figuring out which ones you'd like to save digitally. The blessing of this particular task is that you will remember people and times important to you. And, you will find hope and inspiration for what life will be like at the other end of all this. Only do a little bit each day. Don't force yourself to plow through this or any task "just because." That won't be helpful. The goal here is to fill your time, not pulverize it or yourself under an avalanche of what used to be and is no more. Instead, choose projects to savor this gift of time, our most precious commodity and one usually in very short supply.

REALITY CHECK #3: Remember you are not alone in dealing with all this. Literally every person you see in real life, on Facebook or even on television is going through the exact same thing. And we are being asked to remember we are in this together and to act accordingly. Stay home unless you absolutely have to go out. Wash your hands a lot. And, dear ones, please remember to pray. Know that God is with you in this, sharing your frustrations and fears. When you find yourself at your wit's end as worry, fear and anxiety threatens to wash over you like a tidal

wave, remember these words from Proverbs 3: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your instinct." So very true...

A REMINDER that today, Wednesday, April 1, @ 4:30pm I will be offering a Facebook Live mini-retreat on the basics of spiritual practice for anyone who is interested. Think of it as exploring all the many, many ways to connect with God, now and in the future. Today we'll be talking about journaling and letter-writing as spiritual practice. Hope you can join me.

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Do something kind for someone else, and yourself. Wash your hands. Again... And Happy April Fools Day!!!
Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 20 (Thursday, April 2, 2020):

Thursday dawns here in the Valley of Covid-19 and no end in sight to our journey. Time itself feels heavy these days. How are we to deal with this "new normal" when we miss the old normal so keenly? No simple or easy answers for sure. The only way forward is forward. Here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

Today's photo tries to capture this sense of time passing and yet feeling stuck. This empty calendar is on the wall of my study here at home. Its only purpose is to serve as a quick reference for planning as I work on whatever the project of the moment is. Literally a "day-at-a-glance" with no notes. This is a Scenic New England calendar that I think I bought on sale at the local CVS years ago back in November 2019. 😊 Imagine my surprise when I pulled it off the wall this morning to take this photo and realized the featured scene on the calendar for April is in Mystic, CT. But it's not the typical Mystic scenery of the seaport or the ocean. No, it's a photo of an anonymous pond somewhere in Mystic ringed by spectacular blooming shrubbery and it's called "spring in Mystic." Of course, Mystic is minutes from my church in Pawcatuck. I'm there often and missing those trips now very much. Yet here is God once again reminding me in such a simple way that God is paying attention to all this. God is holding all this beauty, along with all our fear

and pain, in the palm of God's hand, reminding us this too shall pass. Thank you, God, for small reminders that we are not alone, ever.

REALITY CHECK #1: Time truly is weighing heavy on our minds and hearts right about now. We all feel the heavy weight of uncertainty about how long all this will need to last before we can find our way back to the "old normal." Truth is, there probably won't be a return to the old normal because this situation will have changed everything in a way that will make the old normal impossible. Those of us fortunate enough to still be working from home wonder how long this bizarre overlap of home and work will be needed. Those who have been laid off or had to close down businesses they have invested so much of themselves in - the weight and pain of this uncertainty must be so hard to bear. My heart aches for you, for all of us, mourning the old normal and fearing just how long this new normal will last and what will be the next new normal after that. In spite of all this heartache, dear ones, the only way forward is forward - together though separate - one day, sometimes one hour, at a time. Truly, we are in this together.

REALITY CHECK #2: Right about now time feels disjointed from reality. It's there certainly. Hours pass. Days slip by and even the calendar turns a page. But this sense of the heaviness of time never quite leaves us. We drag it around with us through the day, struggling under its weight as we are sequestered, my increasingly favorite word for this enforced time at home. I like this word because the jury is still out on how life moves forward at the other end of the Valley of Covid-19. I find myself wondering if this is how the Israelites felt as they wandered through the desert after escaping from Egypt. No wonder they got upset with Moses and Moses in turn got irritated with God over how to deal with these "stiff-necked people" as he called them. 40 years they wandered before they entered the Promised Land. Yikes! The good news here is that we can be certain we are NOT looking at 40 years of the current situation. 40 days, maybe. But not 40 years. 40 days doesn't seem quite so bad now, does it!

REALITY CHECK #3: I continue to be truly amazed and inspired by all the ways people in our own community and around the world are finding to care for each other as we wander together in the Valley of Covid-19. Right here people are revving up their sewing machines and dusting off old ones stored in the attic to make face masks. Musicians are giving free concerts on their balconies in Spain and Italy and New York and Washington, DC. Storytellers are telling stories on Facebook Live. Grandparents are reading to grandchildren via Face Time. Talking

and singing dogs are popping up all over Facebook with daily "pup talks" to keep us going. Companies are taking the initiative to switch over their production capabilities to make desperately needed medical supplies. People are encouraging each other with phone calls, notes, texts and waves to complete strangers. Bells are ringing and candle lights in windows are reminding us that truly we are all in this together. Proof positive that blessings abound when we remember to look for them. Where do you find them today? I'd love to hear about them.

A REMINDER that today, Thursday, April 2, @ 2:00pm I will be offering my Virtual Community Office Hours on Facebook Live. This is a chance to talk about how you are coping and to share those "blessings" stories. You can communicate with me with your questions or comments via messaging prior to 2pm or via the comment function on Facebook during the broadcast. Hope you can join me!

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Do something kind for someone else, and yourself. Wash your hands. Again...
Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 21 (Friday, April 3, 2020):

Happy Third Friday in the Valley of Covid-19! I don't know about you but when you are home all the time, even if you're working, the weekends don't feel much like weekends. Thank goodness for all those pinpoints of hope and light surrounding us when we remember to look for them! Today seems like a good day, dark, cold and rainy as it is, to focus on those signs of hope in the ordinary stuff of life we usually take for granted. Like our pets and God's critters. Here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

Today's photo gives a hint of where I got the idea for today's post. This is a photo of Leila, our 3 year old ShihTzu. Leila was the hit of the Facebook Live broadcast of my Virtual Community Office Hours yesterday afternoon. She had flopped down for a nap on the sofa in the study, the perfect location to be in the background during my broadcast. Folks noticed her right away. She is awfully cute, I'll give you that. And she is sweet and affectionate and every inch a puppy. Leila loves to play with anything and everything, keeping all three of us in my house on our toes all the time. She will go after and play with anything, like a candle that dropped to the floor when I was looking for something else. I didn't realize it had fallen until I went to start dinner and found a pile of small white chunks all over her bed. It was the candle which she had been happily gnawing on for about 40 minutes. She wasn't swallowing, just gnawing. All puppy all the time. Every morning my day

begins with picking up her toys scattered all over the main floor of the house. This morning I realized I was smiling as I tidied up her favorite toys, which is really all of them. I realized her puppy-ness is keeping me, my husband and my son sane in the midst of all this craziness. She doesn't know from Covid-19. She knows from long walks and toys and dog treats and supper with the family. She lives love every moment of every day. We all need to learn that, whether we are blessed with pets or not. And even if you are not blessed with your own critter, God's critters are everywhere in the world, in the birds and the squirrels outside your window and even the spiders nestled in the corners of your home. Take a lesson from them that life is a gift to be enjoyed every day no matter what else is going on.

REALITY CHECK #1: Be sure to take a break today from whatever has been occupying your brain, your heart and your mind. If you've been working a lot, stop working and watch a movie or read a book or take a walk in the rain. Your thinking and doing will be sharper after a break and a rest. If you've been worrying a lot, stop and set those worries aside. Literally. Write them on a piece of paper in just a few words and then place the list somewhere for safe-keeping, like a bible or an empty jar somewhere in your house. And leave it there. Put it in God's hands and leave it there. Literally. Even if just for a little while. You'll be surprised at how much lighter you feel.

REALITY CHECK #2: Take the time to count your blessings today. Really, count them. Make a list. Post it somewhere you will see it and, when you're feeling down and overwhelmed, read through it. Make your blessings the focal point of your day instead of your fears and your worries. Let them pull you through the day, maybe even just the next moment. They can if you let them.

REALITY CHECK #3: After you finish your blessings list, add one more thing to it. Add a reminder in big, bold letters that every day that passes brings us one day closer to life after Coronavirus. Hold on to that truth for dear life in those moments when you just don't want to deal with this anymore but not dealing with it is not an option. You can do this. Truly, you can. God is with you through all this if you allow God to be and look for His presence all around you. I admit sometimes you do have to look for it because our tendency is to want to fix things ourselves, handle it on our own. That's an option of course, but not a very good one when the situation to be endured is so very, very challenging and at times downright scary. Let God help you bear the load of each day. If you reach out to God, I promise you God will reach back.

A REMINDER that this coming Sunday, April 5, I will be leading the Palm Sunday Worship service for UCC Westerly on Facebook Live at 9:45am. This will be a home based version of our annual "Journey Through Holy Week" Symbols service. The worship resource we will be using will be posted on the church's Facebook page soon. Hope you can join us!

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Do something kind for someone else, and yourself. Wash your hands. Again...
Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 22 (Saturday, April 4, 2020):

Another day dawns, so much like the one yesterday and the one to come tomorrow for so many of us. One day just sort of seeps into the next as time chugs along in this disjointed life here in the Valley of Covid 19. Sleep at night is sometimes restful, sometimes not. Daily routines now greatly restricted allow for the occasional busy morning or afternoon, but too often time weighs heavy. Ironic that those of us who would lament about not enough time at home now complain about too much. We long for the return to our busy, mundane lives. We long to find "sanctuary" here in the Valley of Covid-19. Here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

Today's photo is of one of my favorite worship banners in our sanctuary at UCC Westerly. One of our Confirmation classes created it as their Confirmation banner a few years ago to celebrate the beginning of our then newly formed eco-justice ministry at the church, our Pollinator Gardens Project. We are blessed that our church sits on four acres of land which our Pollinator Team, with the help of local partners like the Southern New England Chapter of Wild Ones, the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District, and Stonington Gardens, is transforming into a pollinator habitat. Truly, the church is creating a sanctuary for pollinators and

what we have discovered is that in the process of doing that, we are also creating a unique kind of sanctuary for humans too. This ministry of sanctuary has become central to who we are as a church and how we interact with the community. So, it seems fitting that in the midst of our communal journey through the Valley of Covid-19, we remind you of the presence of sanctuary in your lives. Sanctuary can be a designated physical space, like the sacred space of a church or a nature preserve, where the notion of the sacredness and interconnectedness of all of life is acknowledged and honored. I would argue that sanctuary is also a state of mind as we work to cultivate a sense of grounding for life each day based in the concrete reality surrounding us but not trapped there because of the sure and certain knowledge that there is so much more to life than what we can see and hear and touch and smell. Sanctuary is the liminal space where one pauses to explore the possibilities of life without physical limitations, like being stuck in the house during a global pandemic. Sanctuary is where we encounter the divine within and without our selves. Funny thing about sanctuary, though. You have to earnestly seek it to find it. In other words, sanctuary is active, not passive. Once found, though, sanctuary is truly life-giving. May you persevere in your seeking.

REALITY CHECK #1: This is getting all too real. The news is filled with skyrocketing statistics of the not good kind. Skeptics are being silenced as illness and death stalk folks from all walks of life. Fear and worry are constant companions. Grief at who and what has already been lost is very real. Literally we are awash in a sea of emotions we can scarcely control, and yet control them we must or we cannot function as we need to. So, what are we to do? The same things we have been doing: taking one day at a time, even one moment at a time and filling the minutes and hours as best we can.

REALITY CHECK #2: Personal contact with other people really matters but how do we do that in the midst of "social" distancing? Well, the first thing to remember is that "social" distancing is a misnomer. It's really physical distancing we're being asked to practice. Being social is still possible. It just looks very, very different. It looks like FaceTime and Skype phone conversations with loved ones and friends. It sounds like long phone conversations with a good friend, a cup of tea or a glass of wine in your hand. It tastes like a good meal prepared with and for the folks you share your home with. It feels like a warm hug in the smiles and waves from folks we pass by and through notes and letters sent and received. We are still social and that has not changed. Just the way we practice social has shifted temporarily. It is not gone forever, even though it may seem that way.

REALITY CHECK #3: As I have been saying all along but it definitely bears repeating every day, because it is a simple truth pulling us forward through all this especially when we are at our wits' end. Here it is: Every day that passes by brings us one day closer to the end of this. We don't have a specific "end date" and we don't know if the re-engagement of our society will be gradual or fast. Yet, we do know that it will end and, when it does, we will be able once again to engage in the lives we love all the sweeter for what we have endured. What's the first thing you will do when that longed for day comes? Something to think about for sure...

A REMINDER: I will be leading a Palm Sunday worship service on Facebook Live tomorrow @ 9:45am. My husband and son will be assisting me with the centerpiece of that worship - the Journey Through Holy Week presented through the symbols liturgy. We will also be joining in Communion together though we will be scattered. If you would like to join in Communion, all you need at the ready is a glass of juice or wine (your choice) and a piece of bread or cracker (again, your choice). Hope you can join us. The At Home Worship resource for this service will be available on the church Facebook Page @ United Congregational Church of Westerly and on our website, www.uccwesterly.org.

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Day 23 (Sunday, April 5, 2020):

Good morning and welcome to Palm Sunday here in the Valley of Covid-19, one of the most sacred of days in the Christian tradition. I have intentionally not used these daily posts as an opportunity to advocate for the importance of faith in the Christian tradition or any faith tradition. This is what we in the church call "evangelism." I haven't done it because that is not the reason for these posts. Instead these posts are intended as a means of offering community reassurance in the form of a written ministry of presence. My faith undergirds how I approach this particular form of writing so it is present here every day, but using this post to encourage each of you to join me in the practice of my faith tradition has never been the point and that will not change. That being said, today is Palm Sunday and that reality will be the focus of today's post. Here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

First the photo. This could be a live photo of our altar at UCC Westerly as it would look on this Palm Sunday morning but it's not. I took it when I was down at the

church last Wednesday briefly just to check up on a few things. I left the altar spotlight on after I took the photo because I wanted the cross to remain illuminated as we are enduring this scary and challenging reality of the pandemic which is getting worse by the day. It comforts me to think of that cross, draped for the Season of Lent, still illuminated even as my faith illuminates every day for me. Perhaps your faith illuminates and anchors how you are coping with this situation each day. Perhaps it doesn't. I'm not telling anyone what to think or what to believe. I am only sharing the truth that it is my faith getting me through each day, shining a circle of light before me just large enough to show me my next step into whatever the future holds. I know that some people do not believe in God. I once had a philosophy professor who argued the belief that God does not exist is every bit as much a belief as the belief God does exist. Perhaps, but not my point. What you believe is no one's business but yours. Faith for some of us though, is everything. One of the blessings of our current "sequestration" at home is the chance to consider or even re-consider our own faith and its practice. I hope these daily posts are of some small assistance in this regard.

REALITY CHECK #1: Palm Sunday will happen whether or not there are people in the churches, whether or not masses and worship services are offered in beautiful churches or palms parades fill the streets. This is because the meaning of Palm Sunday is not contained within any building nor is it reflective of the ways in which any particular Christian faith tradition celebrates it. Palm Sunday is part and parcel of God's gift of love to God's people in the form of Jesus Christ. The events of Holy Week are remembered and celebrated in the week ahead also as a tangible way to remind ourselves who Jesus was, who we are because of him, and how much God loves us, no matter what else, good or bad, is going on in the world.

REALITY CHECK #2: Our Palm Sunday celebrations will be different this year, but no less heart felt, no less important because they occur in a strange "gathered and scattered" way. This is a powerful reminder for us who claim the name Christian that we are always called to be the people of Christ, in the church building AND outside of it. We have to the people of Christ out in the world where are homes are located because we have no choice at this moment in time. I wonder how this will be transformative for the churches and for faith in the months and years to come. I for one am pretty excited.

REALITY CHECK #3: Whether you are a person of faith or not, whether you care that it's Palm Sunday or not, whether you are someone missing Sunday brunch more

than the chance to go to church - no matter who you are in this moment in the Valley of Covid-19, we are still one day closer to the end of all this. Time marches on, relentlessly. Crises come and they go. Some linger longer than others. Some, like this one, change the world forever whether we like it or not. That's why I try to live each day in *Kairos* time, God's time, rather than *Kronos* time as the world measures it. Time still moves forward in *Kairos*, but always and forever cocooned in the love of God, guiding our footsteps through whatever comes our way. *Kairos* is time marked and bounded by God's timeline, not humans'. That is more comforting to me than anything as these days in the Valley of Covid-19 slip by. Perhaps it can be for you as well.

A REMINDER: I will be leading a Palm Sunday worship service on Facebook Live today @ 9:45am. My husband and son will be assisting me with the centerpiece of that worship - the Journey Through Holy Week presented through the symbols liturgy. We will also be joining in Communion together though we will be scattered. If you would like to join in Communion, all you need at the ready is a glass of juice or wine (your choice) and a piece of bread or cracker (again, your choice). Hope you can join us. The At Home Worship resource for this service is available on the church Facebook Page @ United Congregational Church of Westerly and on our website, www.uccwesterly.org.

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Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 24 (Monday, April 6, 2020):

Welcome to another day of trudging through the Valley of Covid- 19. This seemingly never ending journey is getting pretty old right about now. The desire to return to the mundane "same old -same old" of our pre-Covid-19 days is almost overwhelming at times. Perfectly understandable, but it won't change anything. So how do we continue our mutual slog forward when we just desperately want it over? That's the question, isn't it? Here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

Today's photo is of a treasured artifact from my life as a mother with young kids still in the house. Obviously, it's a footprint - my daughter's to be precise, when she was about 12 or 13. She made it as part of a wonderful week at summer camp under the expert guidance and extraordinary ministry of my dear friend Megan Weymouth. It was sleep-away camp at the Irons Homestead up in the wilds (work with me here) of northern Rhode Island. A small pond for swimming and kayaking was a part of the magic of that summer and one day Megan took them down to the water's edge at dawn to make squishy footprints in the sand into which she then poured something like cement to make these molds of their feet. It was a treasured possession of Amanda's for years and then, when it was time for her to set aside "childish things," it came to me for safe-keeping. Today feels like the reason I've been holding on to this all these years. That's because here in the Valley of Covid-19, today feels like one of those moments when all we can do is

concentrate on putting one foot in front of the other to make it through the next hour, the next afternoon, the next day, the next week ... however long the journey will be until the end of the Valley is finally in sight. One foot in front of the other ... that's all we need to do today.

REALITY CHECK #1: Today is the perfect day to look for such an "artifact" of happier days in your home. Identify it, pull it out and put it on a special cloth. Remind yourself of the story connected with it. Give the ones part of that story a call, if that is possible. If not, write them a letter or note to let them know, wherever they are in God's cosmos, that you remember and treasure that moment.

REALITY CHECK #2: If you are feeling like you just can't deal with one more day of all this staying at home and mask wearing and physical distancing, etc., etc., etc., congratulations! You are right there with the rest of us. While some of us may be working diligently to continually discover the blessings of this unique moment in history (and there are some) all of us - including the blessing-counters - are just so ready for this to be over. You are in very good company with your frustration and irritation! Just don't let it consume you. Instead focus on easing the frustration of someone else because the best way to escape your own negative feelings is to replace them with a positive action. Let me know what you decide to do!

REALITY CHECK #3: I've said this every day from the beginning of this daily post more than three weeks ago, but it bears repeating simply because it's true. And it's a truth to hold on to like a life preserver in these days when it feels like this will last forever. It won't. Today we are one day closer to the end of all this, one day closer to emerging from the Valley of Covid-19. We'll get there. I promise.

REMINDER: Here is a listing of the Facebook Live experiences I will be hosting during this week, Holy Week in the Christian tradition:

- Wednesday, April 8 @ 4:30pm - Spiritual Practices Mini-Retreat
- Thursday, April 9 @ 2pm - Virtual Community Office Hours
- Thursday, April 9 @ 6:30pm - Maundy Thursday service
- Friday, April 10, @ 12 noon - Good Friday Prayers at the Cross

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Do something kind for someone else, and yourself. Wash your hands. Again...

Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 25 (Tuesday, April 7, 2020):

Another day in the Valley of Covid-19 stretches out ahead of us. We'd really rather be somewhere, anywhere else but that is quite literally not an option. And now we have reached the point in this Coronavirus journey where special equipment for continuing is needed. I don't know about you but I have a whole new respect for medical professionals and others who have to wear masks all day, every day, because wearing one when I am out in public is driving me nuts! But this is where we are so deal with it we must. Here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

No surprise that today's photo is of some face masks. Apologies to the sewists and Mission Board folks at UCC Westerly who are coordinating our face masks sewing project. These masks are Peter's, given to him by a wise friend in the medical field who was convinced a month ago that we would end up exactly where we are and she wanted to be sure Peter had masks. He hates them. But, he wears them because he, like more of our dear ones than we want to think about, is in the high risk category for a bad scenario should he catch the virus. He is recovering from prostate cancer and he has asthma. He's also not liking that he needs to stay in the house and I am the one on the front lines with the world as the Valley of Covid-19 remains our reality. Such is the case for so many folks these days. Those

who have medical conditions that are usually managed quite easily with medications and therapies so they are able to live fulfilling, vibrant lives are now stuck at home, afraid to go out. That, dear ones, is very difficult and depressing. But, as I see so many others reminding us on Facebook each day, this too shall pass. And it will.

REALITY CHECK #1: Some inherently grumpy and cantankerous folks are even grumpier these days, but the vast majority of folks seems to be open to a sort of metamorphosis taking place as this journey continues. People are being nice to each other, even to strangers! People are smiling and waving, from a distance to be sure, but the smiles are genuine. People are helping out however they can. Some folks are still stuck in perpetual nasty, but many, many more are discovering the simple reward of just being nice. Look for the nice people today ... and wave back!!

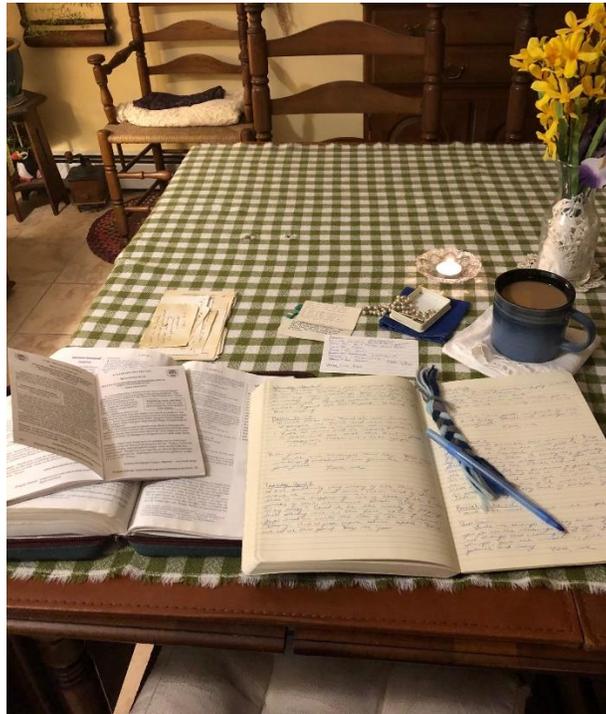
REALITY CHECK #2: Never in my life did I ever expect to see and experience the kind of response we are seeing in our country and indeed the world to the shortage of face masks. Everyone, it seems, is sewing or following directions to make homemade masks by intricate folding of bandanas, napkins, etc. Admittedly some of us, like myself, are fabric impaired so all I am able to do is cheer on those of you who are sewing so diligently, including folks from my own church. If you'd like more information on our efforts and how you can support them, just PM me and I will put you in touch with our coordinators.

REALITY CHECK #3: One day closer to the end of all this is still our most important realization each day. I know it's not much in those moments when you feel so totally and completely weary of all this, but it is something. Look for the blessings of this day because they are surely there. Smile as much as you can, even if it's at yourself in the mirror. This is actually kind of fun because you can see for yourself how a smile changes your whole appearance. It really does!! Try it and let me know how it goes...

REMINDER: Here is a listing of the Facebook Live experiences I will be hosting during this week, Holy Week in the Christian tradition:

- Wednesday, April 8 @ 4:30pm - Spiritual Practices Mini-Retreat
- Thursday, April 9 @ 2pm - Virtual Community Office Hours
- Thursday, April 9 @ 6:30pm - Maundy Thursday service
- Friday, April 10, @ 12 noon - Good Friday Prayers at the Cross

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Do something kind for someone else, and yourself. Wash your hands. Again...
Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 26 (Wednesday, April 8, 2020):

An interesting thing is happening as we continue our daily slog through the Valley of Covid-19. The contours of the Valley itself are changing. The scenery in the Valley is becoming visible as we find the routine of this "new normal" that has been thrust upon us. Sadly, this is not true for all of us since some are on the front lines of the onslaught of this terrible disease, whether they want to be or not. Here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

Today's photo gives you a glimpse into how I begin every day and how I have begun every day for as long as I can remember. My daily routine always starts the same way. I empty the dishwasher while a pot of coffee is brewing. Then I pull out my morning devotional materials which are my Bible, my journal, my rosary, a pen, my many scribbled devotional notes, a devotional guide and my favorite bible passages. When all those early morning chores are done, I sit down to enjoy my daily cup of coffee with God. Sometimes I spend an hour in this conversation. Other times

just a few minutes. No matter the length of the time invested, this routine anchors my day and my life, enabling me to move forward through all that shapes the contours of my life each day. It is these contours that have been so upended by our "shelter at home" reality in the Valley of Covid-19. And it is these new routines that are now becoming comfortable as I adjust to this new reality I neither want nor chose. None of us did. But here we are and my realization that even these unwelcome new contours of daily life can become comfortable offers hope that I will be able to endure all this for as long as needed. You can too.

REALITY CHECK #1: Let me immediately clarify that not all of us will be able to find comfort in these new routines because this new reality has brought them challenges beyond anything they could ever have imagined, challenges they would just as soon leave by the wayside. But circumstances make that impossible. I'm talking about all the folks who have to be out there in the midst of all this day after day: doctors, nurses, CNA's, respiratory therapists, dietary personnel, housekeeping staff and medical technologists in the labs running the tests on which so much rests. And we must include all those folks still working in our communities in the grocery stores, the pharmacies, the gas stations, the banks, the postal workers, the police, firefighters, and EMT's - all of them on the front lines of possible infection because of the essential work they do. I'm also not talking about the folks who have lost jobs and whose economic security, their very future, is now on the line. I'm certainly not talking about all the folks who are ill, some fighting for their lives against this dreaded disease, some who have already lost the battle, and all those who love them. For these folks, there is no comfort of routine. There is only a mixture of worry, fear, and sadness in balance with determination and courage to get past it all somehow.

REALITY CHECK #2: The reality that some of us can enjoy the comfort of routine in this new normal, and some of us cannot, is the very reason why every single one of us must do whatever we can to carry our part of the load in this bizarre situation. Do not go out to the store or anywhere unless you need to. If you must go out, treat it as a necessary task and not an outing to be prolonged and enjoyed. Now is not the time to browse in the grocery store or the Home Depot, as much as you desperately want to. If this is just too difficult, dare to believe that you could be making everyone you breathe on ill because you are a carrier of the disease without being sick yourself. That IS a possibility with this disease, one of the things which makes it so deadly. Stay home DOES mean YOU.

REALITY CHECK #3: In spite of all this - the comfort of new routines in the new normal juxtaposed with the worry of forever altered lives - we are still one day closer to the end of all this. We are still one day closer to whatever life will be like for all of us after this. What dreams and hopes do you have for that time? Today might be the perfect time to start on that list...

REMINDER: Here is a listing of the Facebook Live experiences I will be hosting during this week, Holy Week in the Christian tradition:

- TODAY, April 8 @ 4:30pm - Spiritual Practices Mini-Retreat
- Thursday, April 9 @ 2pm - Virtual Community Office Hours
- Thursday, April 9 @ 6:30pm - Maundy Thursday service
- Friday, April 10, @ 12 noon - Good Friday Prayers at the Cross

Best wishes for a blessed Passover to our Jewish brothers and sisters.

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Do something kind for someone else, and yourself. Wash your hands. Again...

Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 27 (Thursday, April 9, 2020):

Our journey through the Valley of Covid-19 has brought us right to the middle of one of the holiest weeks of the year for Christians and Jews. Our Jewish brothers and sisters began the Passover celebrations at sundown last evening. With the exception of our brothers and sisters in the Orthodox Christian tradition who will be celebrating in a few weeks, we in the Christian tradition are in the midst of Holy Week, also known as Passion Week, since it marks the final days of Jesus' earthly life. Both the Jewish and Christian traditions celebration of this week assume crowds of folks being together to mark these sacred moments in the midst of fellow believers and people we love and respect. But not this year. This year we face these sacred experiences in a much more solitary way, here in the midst of the Valley of Covid-19. Here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

My photo today is of a sampler I made back in the seventies. Yes, I am that old. No, that does not make it an antique. What it is, though, is a testimony to the central role prayer has always played in my life. I learned my faith from my mother. Not from what she overtly taught me which was little. I learned from watching her, what she did to cope with and manage her life, a life filled with joys but also many challenges not of her own making. What she did was pray and trust that God was in the midst of whatever challenge she faced. She did teach me one thing as a small child, a basic truth that has anchored my entire adult life: I am never alone as long as I trust that Jesus always walks beside me. That is my truth as someone born into and brought up in the Protestant Christian faith. Just as

surely as I know this is my truth, I also know it is not the only truth when it comes to cultivating a relationship with God. That's because God is way bigger and more complex than any "box" we humans can create to try to explain and confine God. Unfortunately, that happens far too often due to the basic human sin of arrogance. We humans think we know more than we actually do, even when it comes to God. Lucky for us God is very patient and forgiving of all our human frailties. So, on this day, dear ones, whatever faith tradition or lack thereof guides your life, pause for a moment to consider how deeply fragile our relationship with the divine, with each other and with Creation truly is. And then, if you're of a mind to, pause and have a chat with God, whomever you know him or her to be.

REALITY CHECK #1: Yes, I realize this is an overtly religious post but in the midst of what is literally called "Holy Week," it seems like the thing to do. Know that I respect your belief, or lack thereof, as your belief. Your relationship with God - the cosmos - the sacred - the divine - is no one's business but yours.

REALITY CHECK #2: Most people who are turned off by religion are actually pushing back hard against a specific, negative, even harmful personal experience connected to a particular religious institution or specific persons. Again, your business. My only suggestion is not to let that negative experience control you to the extent that you are afraid to encounter the deep meaning and relevance of having God in your life. God is not the sole purview of any one religious tradition or institution or person. Each of those traditions represent a human attempt to understand and relate to God in a meaningful way. But, God is God, always. Try not to blame God for human error. It's hard, I know. Instead, try reaching toward the God you sense in your heart and God will reach back. Of this I am certain.

REALITY CHECK #3: Life is fragile, best handled with prayer of whatever sort gives meaning and comfort to you. Prayer takes many forms beyond specific words, written, spoken or thought. Prayer can be any action taken with the intent of reaching out to God. Know that even as you consider this most expansive of topics in your mind and heart, the days here in the Valley of Covid-19 continue to slip past and we are all one day closer to what we will discover at the other end of this unexpected excursion into a completely different way of life.

REMINDER: Here is a listing of the Facebook Live experiences I will be hosting during Holy Week in the Christian tradition:

- Thursday, April 9 @ 2pm - Virtual Community Office Hours

- Thursday, April 9 @ 6:30pm - Maundy Thursday service
- Friday, April 10, @ 12 noon - Good Friday Prayers at the Cross
- Sunday, April 12 @ 6am - Easter Sunrise Service from my Front Porch
- Sunday, April 12 @ 9:45am - Easter Service with a few surprises!

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Do something kind for someone else, and yourself. Wash your hands. Again...
Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 28 (Friday, April 10, 2020):

Good Friday provides a road marker of sorts today as our journey through the Valley of Covid-19 continues. On its surface, Good Friday isn't "good" at all because its purpose is to pause to reflect on the unjust, undeserved pain and suffering of one person, Jesus of Nazareth. Perhaps that is why Good Friday feels especially poignant and appropriate as the pandemic continues to ravage our communities, our country and the world. Here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

Today's photo is of a miniature version of *The Pieta*, the famous statue by Michelangelo which resides in St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City. Sculpted in the late 15th Century, it is a poignant representation of the reality of this day we call

Good Friday as the dead body of Jesus, just taken down from the cross, is cradled by his mother Mary. I have always loved this sculpture, capturing as it does a moment in time so exquisitely that we can feel the pain of this mother cradling her dead son. To me, this is a mother cradling a dead child. The fact that this child is on the way to becoming Jesus the Christ is beside the point. This is a tangible representation of grief so powerful our stomach knots when we gaze at it, even in this inexpensive little copy. It belies the reason Good Friday is called "good" when so much gut-wrenching grief is portrayed so vividly, recalling for everyone that awful pain of losing someone we love in death. And that's the point. In two days time when this dead Jesus is dead no longer, and the tomb is empty, we will be celebrating the Christian belief that Jesus' death frees us from the burden of sin even as it breaks the stranglehold of death as the final word. This is a tough concept to grapple with, even for the most devout of Christians, because death is all around us far too often, especially as we find ourselves in the midst of this global pandemic. Illness and death confront us every night on the news. Perhaps even among our own family and friends the specter of Covid-19 is too close, too personal. And yet hope remains because it must. Hope is our only pathway out of this Covid-19 nightmare and back to the lives, and the people, we love. May the hope which hides in the midst of the darkness of Good Friday guide us forward.

REALITY CHECK #1: Remember that hope is a verb as well as a noun. One can have hope, but that is a much more passive activity. What is needed now more than ever is for each of us, all of us, to exercise hope as a verb. Go through this day as one who hopes, as one who trusts that this all shall pass one day, and somehow we will ultimately be the better for it in strange ways we cannot imagine in this scary moment. We can only hope it will be so. And it will, if we make it so.

REALITY CHECK #2: Exercising hope as a verb requires concrete action, like making phone calls to folks you know who may be feeling especially isolated or checking in with an elderly or medically fragile neighbor to see if they need anything, or even buying a take-out lunch or dinner from a restaurant struggling to hang on. Hope is wearing a face mask even though it is really annoying because the mask is not about you. It's a tangible expression of your hope not to infect someone else if you are carrying the virus without knowing it. Hope is stopping to listen to the birds sing or to admire an especially beautiful blooming forsythia bush or fruit tree because they are absolutely magnificent this year. I think God knew we were going to need some extra smiles this spring!

REALITY CHECK #3: Hope is confidence we are truly one day closer to the end of all this, expressed in concrete plans for that list of first things you will do when our time of isolation gradually comes to an end. Dear ones, hope is the most powerful action we can take and the most reassuring characteristic we can cultivate in ourselves right now. What better time to do that than in the midst of this sacred week where Passover and Passion Week intersect, an occurrence that does not often happen. Like those gorgeous, blooming reminders of God's presence this week, God knew we needed to pull together to get through this. And so we have. And so we shall.

REMINDER: Here is a listing of the Facebook Live experiences I will be hosting during this, the weekend of Holy Week:

- Friday, April 10, @ 12 noon - Good Friday Prayers at the Cross
- Sunday, April 12 @ 6am - Easter Sunrise Service from my Front Porch
- Sunday, April 12 @ 9:45am - Easter Service with a few surprises!

Worship resources for all of these services can be found on the church's Facebook page (United Congregational Church of Westerly) and our website, www.uccwesterly.org.

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Do something kind for someone else, and yourself. Wash your hands. Again...
Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 29 (Saturday, April 11, 2020):

Welcome to Holy Saturday here in the Valley of Covid-19. Not many of us think of this as "Holy Saturday" but it is, wedged in between the somberness of Good Friday and the unrestrained joy of Easter. So, is it holy or not? Depends on your perspective, just like so many of the questions facing us during this prolonged time of isolation and quarantine. Here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

Today's photo is of something I didn't even know I had until a few days ago when I was scouring my home for photos for these daily posts. I couldn't believe it when I found this sitting on the shelf in my kitchen, the back-drop of the worship services I am broadcasting from my home these days. This mug is a part of my mother's collection of children's mugs, most of which date to the mid- 19th century. These mugs were intended as object lessons for children as they ate their meals at home. Talk about home-schooling! They taught simple lessons on everything from temperance to honoring parents to learning the alphabet. I knew this from watching my mom collect them, reveling in each new one she found. Still, I had no idea I had this one - "isolated." Such a strange object lesson for a child of the 1800's, or was it? Clearly, the illustration shows the dangers of wandering off when enjoying a fun activity as a skater falls through thin ice and realizes he is isolated from his friends. Will they risk falling through the ice themselves to save him? We don't know. This feels very much like where we are right now in the

midst of this seemingly endless disruption of our lives. We know folks are risking their own health to help all us get through this dangerous Coronavirus situation, but we don't know for sure what will happen if we or a loved one gets sick. This adds to our feelings of isolation already at their peak, cut off as we are from the people we care about. Welcome to the Holy Saturday experience of Easter - the day when Jesus laid in the cold dark in a hastily draped shroud, his body still dirty and bloody from the events of the day before. On this day of Holy Week, the dead Jesus was isolated from life. But this isolation was not the end. For Christians, it is the precursor to a whole new way of life to be revealed as the sun rises the next morning. Even in the midst of isolation and death as profound as this, hope waits to be born anew. May it be so for us.

REALITY CHECK#1: Whether or not you are a Christian, the message of Easter is one of hope and we all need hope to get us through these days. We who are Christian are happy to share our hope with you. It's what we do...

REALITY CHECK #2: For all of you who usually spend this day before Easter running around shopping for everything from Portuguese Easter Bread to new shoes for the kids, good news! That's going to be impossible to do this year! Money and time saved! Now we both know you are going to try to at least get some Easter candy and that's okay IF you wear a mask and practice social distancing as we are all supposed to be doing. A reminder as you head out, DO NOT dispose of your plastic gloves anyplace but a trash receptacle. Dropping them anyplace else creates a biohazard for everyone, including you.

REALITY CHECK #3: Even though this time of isolation and quarantine seems endless, like being confined in your very own tomb of sorts, this too shall pass. Every day we are one day closer to that joyous moment when the lives we love will be resurrected into the new beginnings awaiting us at the end of this ordeal. Hope lives even in the cold, dark tomb. Let it live in you too, this day and every day.

REMINDER: Here is a listing of the Facebook Live experiences I will be hosting tomorrow on Easter Sunday:

- Sunday, April 12 @ 6am - Easter Sunrise Service from my Front Porch
- Sunday, April 12 @ 9:45am - Easter Service with a few surprises!

Worship resources for all of these services can be found on the church's Facebook page (United Congregational Church of Westerly) and our website, www.uccwesterly.org.

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Do something kind for someone else, and yourself. Wash your hands. Again...
Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 30 (Sunday, April 12, 2020):

A *Kairos* moment here in the Valley of Covid-19 on this, the 30th day of our quarantine or stay at home or shelter in place or whatever you are calling it in your mind and heart. A *Kairos* moment is a God moment, a moment marked by God's sense of timing rather than the human sense, *Kronos*. Why is this a *Kairos* moment? Because the Easter story is all about release from fear and death and confinement. Whether you "believe" in the Christian tenet of the resurrection or not, surely the serendipity of this calendar coincidence is worth noting. Here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

Nothing remarkable or unique about today's photo of traditional Easter flowers I am using to create a tiny sense of what the altar in our church usually looks like on Easter. But this year's Easter celebration will be so different for everyone, whatever your tradition. Easter egg hunts will be solitary affairs within families under the watchful eyes of parents anxious that little ones maintain social distance in spite of that being totally contrary to their nature. No new outfits to wear to church or the family dinner at Grandma's house. No driving from relative to relative to spread Easter joy and eat way too much. The good news though, and there is always good news even if we have to dig a little deeper to find it, is that

there will still be Easter chocolate and Easter baskets and Easter flowers and Easter meals and even Easter worship online. Most importantly, we will remind ourselves once again of the eternal promise of Easter - that new life is always ready to emerge from any and every crisis, that we are never trapped in the tomb of scary moments forever.

REALITY CHECK #1: It is a gorgeous day - a little chilly here where I am, but absolutely, stunningly gorgeous. It's the perfect day to do whatever you want and need to do to take care of you. It IS okay to do that. I would argue it's even more necessary than usual as the Coronavirus anxiety we all live with daily takes a toll, whether we realize it or not, whether we acknowledge it or not. Be kind to yourself today. That's a good thing.

REALITY CHECK #2: Today is also a perfect day to check in with family and friends to see how they're doing. Wish them a Happy Easter if that seems appropriate. Share a memory together about a gathering that touches your heart, on the phone or FaceTime or Skype or however you keep in touch. Holidays are about making memories and remembering memories of past celebrations. Make a point of doing that today. Don't forget that this Easter with all its annoyances and anxiety will be one heck of a memory in years to come. What will you want to remember about it? Make some notes. Do some family interviews. Take some photos. Create the memories of this year too, and dare to put them side by side on the shelf of your heart with all those remembrances of happy days gone by. There will come a time when the memories of this year will matter to you. Dare to start capturing them now.

REALITY CHECK #3: Memories are being made right now, this year, in the middle of the Valley of Covid-19 as we celebrate Passover and Easter and birthdays and anniversaries and anything else that pops up. Memories yet to be made are waiting out there in *Kairos* time. True, we don't know when our lives will return to "normal" if we even know what that means anymore. But someday in the not too distant future we will be able to go back to work and school and Little League and dance class and the theater and our favorite restaurant and ... We know this is so because every day that passes is one day closer to our own resurrection to a whole new and wonderful life at the end of the Covid-19 journey. Trust that is true and have a very happy day today.

REMINDER: I hope you'll join us for our one remaining Easter service as this post is published.

- Sunday, April 12 @ 9:45am - Easter Service with a few surprises! The worship resource can be found on the church's Facebook page (United Congregational Church of Westerly) and our website, www.uccwesterly.org.
- Next week I will continue leading worship from my home as we transition into the church season of Eastertide. We'll be using these weeks until Pentecost to explore folks in the Bible who have also endured some challenging experiences and how they managed. You might be surprised...

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I am taking tomorrow, Monday, April 11, as a day of renewal for myself so I will not be publishing IT IS WHAT IT IS again until Tuesday, April 12. Thanks for understanding...

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Do something kind for someone else, and yourself. Wash your hands. Again...

Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 32 (Tuesday, April 14, 2020):

I'm back!! Thanks to all of you following this post for understanding my need to take a break yesterday. I do appreciate your patience. I also encourage you to do the same now and then during these extraordinary times through which we are living. The Valley of Covid-19 has all of us in an almost unrelenting state of anxiety and that, dear ones, is truly exhausting. Dare to give yourself permission to take a break from it as you need to. Here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

As always, a little about this photo. Obviously, it is a photo of Easter lilies in a glass of water (the glass was my husband's idea of a vase 😊). If you watched either of the Facebook Live Easter services, you caught a glimpse of these Easter flowers. These are some of the lilies, after yesterday's storm brutalized them. I had left them outside on the porch because I have every intention of getting them in the ground in my front yard today. Then yesterday's storm hit and holy cow! All the Easter plants blew right over, despite my efforts to shelter them behind the porch furniture. These lilies are the result, casualties of the storm that broke the stem right off. But, here they are, the day after the storm, as beautiful as ever. One could even say they are more beautiful having survived a terrible battering by forces of nature beyond anyone's control. Hmmm, food for thought for us here in the Valley of Covid-19.

REALITY CHECK #1: The Covid-19 numbers are getting bad now, just as we were told they would. But that doesn't make it any less scary to see them continue to

rise, day after day. We're told it would be worse if we weren't doing all the social distancing we are, but that's difficult to imagine. By now, many of us know someone who has been ill, is ill or has died from this awful infection. Covid-19 is now very, very real as are all the impacts of this lock-down we find ourselves dealing with more and more every day. We love our homes and families but, let's be honest, enough already!!! And yet, it is what it is and we will need to be in this lock-down situation for awhile now. So, finding ways to cope matters more and more.

REALITY CHECK #2: Yesterday I heard a wonderful reminder of a way to approach this unending need to cope with a situation we never saw coming and for which the end is not in sight. It was a radio interview of a nurse at one of the Boston area hospitals talking about what it was like to be working there now. She was positive, buoyant and upbeat, surprisingly so, given the enormous stress she lives with day in and day out. She said in the interview that it was the ability to take care of people who needed her that kept her going. Then she talked about Mr. Rogers (yes, that Mr. Rogers) and the advice he gave that in the midst of scary situations, you always need to look for the helpers making things better because they are always there. What excellent advice for us to hold on to now because looking for the helpers - and becoming them in whatever ways we are able - is the best way to continue moving forward on our journey through the Valley of Covid-19.

REALITY CHECK #3: Look for the helpers, and be one if you can. What a simple way of living through this reality of lock-down that is starting to wear really, really thin. But, we can do this! We can do this because we have to. We can do this because, quite literally, we have no choice. The only choice we have is in how we endure. As for me, looking for the helpers and being one as I can is working pretty well. Perhaps you're doing this too. If not, give it a try! You don't have to do much. A teddy bear in the window as a friendly sign of hope to neighborhood children is an easy option. So are phone calls to folks who would probably love a simple chat. Look for the helpers and be one if you can - a great way to invest each day as we inch ever closer to the end of this journey through the Valley of Covid 19.

REMINDER: I hope you'll join me at one or more of this week's Facebook Live experiences:

- Wednesday, April 15 @ 4:30pm - The next session of the Spiritual Practices Mini-Retreat, this week focusing on praying with "tangibles."

- Thursday, April 16 @ 2pm - Virtual Community Office Hours, this week I'll be fielding questions and comments from youth on what their experiences are like in this Valley of Covid-19.
- Sunday, April 19 @ 9:45am - Sunday Morning Worship as we make our way through the Season of Eastertide together by exploring Bible stories about people who are coping with extraordinary situations.

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Do something kind for someone else, and yourself. Wash your hands. Again...
Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 33 (Wednesday, April 15, 2020):

We are now more than a month into our journey through the Valley of Covid-19 and it is getting really old. We miss life as it used to be. We crave the ordinary and mundane sweetness of life that seems so far distant now that we fear we will never get it back. So many things about life feel broken and we fear that brokenness will never be made whole. Dear ones, nothing new about this feeling. That's why the two words that appear more often than any others in the Bible are "fear not." Here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

Somewhere in heaven my mom is smiling as yet another piece of her collection of children's plates and mugs is my featured photo for the day. This one is of a story

plate, perhaps part of a series of plates illustrating popular books of the time. Again, most likely dated to the mid 19th century, you can see in the photo that this little plate has had a tough time. It is chipped and cracked in several places. It was even totally broken at one point and someone patiently fixed it. The fact that it has been repaired several times would have decreased its value as an antique but my mother bought it anyway because she loved it. Its brokenness now mended spoke to her powerfully of life stories being unphased by the hurts and damage that come with the human experience for all of us. We are in the midst of a situation we will all long remember, and the impact of Coronavirus and the drastic steps needed to get it under control have forever changed us and our lives. But dear ones we are not really broken. We are merely dinged up a bit. We will get through this together. We will find ways to mend our brokenness for the simple reason that with God, all things are possible.

REALITY CHECK #1: If you woke up this morning thinking, "Okay, enough. I don't want to do this staying at home, social distancing thing anymore." Congratulations! You are living proof that we are all in this together. I am fairly certain that no one anywhere woke up this morning and said, "Oh yay! Another day of Coronavirus lockdown!" Dear ones, we are ALL sick of this by now. We miss going shopping without a care in the world. We miss sending the kids off to hang out with friends without a thought. We miss meeting friends at a favorite restaurant for drinks and a lovely meal. We miss jumping in the car and taking off for a day just to get away. We miss our workplaces whatever and wherever they might be. We just miss our lives. Guess what? That's okay. It just means you have a life worth loving, and that is a very good thing.

REALITY CHECK #2: How we handle these moments of being totally fed up and frustrated with a situation over which we have so little control is, like it or not, the measure of who we are as people and as members of society. The challenge now is to find ways to move beyond our frustrations in order to continue to cope with all this as best we can. How to do that becomes a real question. Over the weeks I've been writing this post, I've given a lot of suggestions for ways to do this: Do something nice for someone else; count your blessings, literally; look for the helpers and be one as you can and so on. Today I give a slightly different suggestion. Today, you might want to consider writing down all your annoyances, frustrations, even points of anger on a piece of paper. Then, when the rain has stopped, go outside and do one of two things: Dig a little hole in your garden and bury your crumpled-up note OR, making sure you are a safe distance from your

home, burn your note at your grill or even just on the sidewalk. In either case, know that as you do this you are giving all your angers, hurts and fears back to God. Dear ones, know that God is ready, willing and able to receive all your anger and hold on to it for you so that it doesn't get stuck in your gut and get worse. I know, I know. Sounds strange. But, I'm pretty sure it will make you feel a little better.

REALITY CHECK #3: No matter what, the simple truth remains that we are all one day closer to the end of this. We don't know yet what the ending will look like, but people are finally starting to plan for it so we know it's coming. Thank God...

REMINDER: I hope you'll join me at one or more of this week's Facebook Live experiences:

- TODAY, Wednesday, April 15 @ 4:30pm - The next session of the Spiritual Practices Mini-Retreat; this week focusing on praying with "tangibles."
- Thursday, April 16 @ 2pm - Virtual Community Office Hours, this week I'll be fielding questions and comments from anyone but especially youth on what their experiences are like in this Valley of Covid-19.
- Sunday, April 19 @ 9:45am - Sunday Morning Worship as we make our way through the Season of Eastertide together by exploring Bible stories about people finding ways to cope. This Sunday we'll be revisiting Peter's denial of Jesus and how living with it affected his life.

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Do something kind for someone else, and yourself. Wash your hands. Again...
Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 34 (Thursday, April 16, 2020):

At this point in our journey through the Valley of Covid-19, we're starting to feel like we're stuck on some bizarre stay-cation that just won't end. We want to believe there is light at the end of this tunnel but some days it is really difficult to even catch a glimpse of it, never mind any kind of a fix on where it could possibly be. But it's out there, dear ones, flickering though it may be as the days in the middle of all this continue to pile up on each other. Here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

Today's photo was taken at one of my favorite places in the world, the Abbey of Regina Laudis in Bethlehem, CT. The Abbey is home to a rather large group of cloistered Benedictine nuns. As such, it is not a retreat center, per se. Rather, if you want to visit you must write (an actual letter on paper with a stamp on an envelope) and request to come for a few days as a guest. Once accepted, you come and live in the guest house (one for women and a separate one for men) and then are folded into the rhythms of the Abbey as you would like and as the sisters invite you. Because it is a cloistered Abbey, much of the grounds are within the cloister enclosure and thus are off limits to guests. I tell you all this to explain why I was not able to walk through this most inviting pasture gate in today's photo. The pasture was within the enclosure and as a guest I was not permitted to go there. There was no one monitoring all the ways, like this gate, that one *could* go into the enclosure. No guard nuns or anything like that. It was just one of the rules that were explained to you when you arrived as a guest. Notably this is true

whether you were accepted as an overnight guest, or as someone visiting their lovely little gift shop. I am sharing this photo of the open pasture gate with you on this day in the Valley of Covid-19 because it is a reminder of two aspects of our current situation. First, it is a reminder that the day is coming soon when the restrictions on our lives will begin to be lifted and we will once again be able to walk through all those forbidden gates and doorways and back into familiar places we miss so much. Second, it is also a tangible reminder of what it means to respect rules set up for the benefit of others as well as ourselves, like the social distancing and wearing of face masks we must deal with every day.

REALITY CHECK #1: Let's face it, most of the social distancing and face mask "rules" are a pain in the neck which are really starting to wear thin right about now. I confess, I do not like to wear my face mask, lovely though it is, made especially for me by our face masks sewing group at the church. But I do wear it and I do observe social distancing as best as I can when I am out. I do it because the society I live in is trusting me to do it. My family and friends, colleagues and church members need me to do it. Every time I go out wearing my face mask and keeping my distance, I show that I am worthy of the trust others have in me to do the right thing. The same is true for you. Can you be trusted to do what you need to? Or will you crash through the gate to the place you're not supposed to be just because you want to, just because your tired of all this? The choice is yours, every moment of every day.

REALITY CHECK #2: At this point, it is becoming challenging to imagine what it will look like for all these restrictions to be rolled back. As we are now beginning to hear and read every day, even the experts aren't sure. That alone is disconcerting. But, like it or not, this too is our reality right now for the simple reason that no one - NO ONE - has ever been through this kind of experience before. This means there is no roadmap for us to follow, or ignore, as we figure out what to do next in this strange and frightening situation. That in itself is difficult for us to wrap our heads around which is why there is some disagreement on how to move forward. How can it be that we are truly in the midst of a brand new experience no one has encountered before? That's pretty amazing when you stop and think about it. And, as we know, new experiences require new responses and new thinking crafted by the persons best equipped to make them. Our role in all this is simple - be patient and be worthy of the trust being placed in us every day to do the right thing as we all move forward through this situation together.

REALITY CHECK #3: In spite of all this confusion and wondering and frustration and irritation and boredom and longing, we are STILL one day closer to the end of all this. That, at least, is cause for celebration. That is worthy of smiles for everyone you see today, and when they ask you why you're smiling, tell them! "We're one day closer to all this being over." I'm thinking they'll smile too.

REMINDER: I hope you'll join me at one or more of this week's Facebook Live experiences:

- TODAY - Thursday, April 16 @ 2pm - Virtual Community Office Hours. I'm hoping for questions and comments about how children and youth are coping with all this. Some better than others is my impression...
- SUNDAY, April 19 @ 9:45am - Sunday Morning Worship as we make our way through the Season of Eastertide by exploring Bible stories about people finding ways to cope with difficult situations. This Sunday we'll be revisiting Peter's denial of Jesus and how living with it affected his life.

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Do something kind for someone else, and yourself. Wash your hands. Again...
Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 35 (Friday, April 17, 2020):

Life goes on here in the Valley of Covid-19. We've been "staying at home" for a month now, hard as that seems to believe. In some respects, it seems like the days are moving by more quickly than I would have thought possible. In other respects, it feels like this has been dragging on forever. That's the amazing thing about time. It's consistent in the way it passes, the seconds and minutes and hours relentlessly unwind. But the experience of that passage of time fluctuates, wildly at times. Through it all, for those of us blessed with a relationship with the divine, God remains a constant, in time and beyond time - worthy of our consideration this day, I think. Here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

I took this photo just yesterday when I was at the church for a few hours. Obviously, it's a photo of one of our gardens - the "Pastor's Garden" as a matter of fact. Yes, this is my little garden patch which I do my best to maintain during gardening season each year. When I came to the church eight years ago, this little garden patch was empty save for these spring bulb plants. So, the garden was gorgeous in the spring - just in time for Easter - and then sort of non-descript the rest of the year. I have added some native, pollinator friendly perennials in keeping with our overall pollinator gardening goals for the entire property, so now it is blooming from spring to fall. But there is something very special indeed about those original spring bulbs now filling this garden and the hearts of everyone who

sees it with smiles. I mean, how can you not smile when you see that many daffodils, punctuated as these are with a few hyacinths. And, as I spoke about in my Virtual Community Office Hours yesterday, it seems to me as though the daffodils everywhere are simply spectacular this year. The church gardens - especially the circular driveway lawn - is filled with them, all blooming, their joyful yellow heads continually dancing on the breezes. I'm betting there are daffodils blooming where you are as well so here's my challenge for you today: Every time you see a daffodil - all by itself or in a big clump - I urge you to see them as smiles from God, specific reminders that God is with us in the midst of all this annoying, fearful, interminable Coronavirus stuff. Smiles abound all around us in these delightful flowers more abundant this year than they have been in a long time. I think that's because God knows how much we need these smiles to brighten our days. What other smiles can you find in your day today?

REALITY CHECK #1: Are any of you dealing with the surprising reality that you are busier now than you ever thought you would be under a "stay at home" order? I know I am and most folks I talk to are experiencing the same phenomenon. Maybe it's because you're working from home like me, not as easy or enjoyable as it sounds, at least in my case. Maybe it's because you are filling your days with volunteer activities in support of community initiatives to mitigate the impact of the Coronavirus - like sewing face masks or shopping for neighbors and family or driving to run errands for others. Maybe it's because you're tackling all those long-avoided tasks that have been piling up at home for years - like putting all those photos into albums, digitally or physically. Or cleaning and reorganizing the garage, the basement, etc. Or maybe you're trying to work from home at the same time you are overseeing your kids' virtual learning requirements from school. Yikes! No wonder the days fly by. Who would have believed that staying at home could be so exhausting?

REALITY CHECK #2: Call me crazy, but as I told our Deacons last night at our virtual meeting, every time I am in the church building once a week, I get this sense of how much she misses all of our folks being there. We are a busy, vital church and there is usually someone, often multiple folks, at the church every weekday doing this, that or some other project. And, of course, as we gather on Sundays for worship together and for fellowship following, the joy and community celebration every week is heart-warming and soul-tending. It makes sense that we, the members and friends of this congregation, would miss being at church with each other. But I am convinced the church herself misses us being there too.

Church buildings, I believe, take on the character of the people who gather in them and our odd, modern, beautiful church has done just that. The building reflects the love our people have for God, for each other and for the many ministries in our community that we believe God has called us to. I'm betting many of you have buildings that are missing you right about now. What are they? Which are the first ones you will visit when that glorious day of escaping home "confinement" finally comes? Fun to think about, isn't it?

REALITY CHECK #3: Good news! We are one day closer to all those empty buildings like churches and schools and libraries and our favorite businesses and restaurants ARE now one day closer to being empty no more! An excellent reason to keep smiling today - whether you see daffodil smiles or not!

REMINDER: I hope you'll join me at one or more of the Facebook Live experiences UCC Westerly has planned in the days ahead:

- SUNDAY, April 19 @ 9:45am - Sunday Morning Worship as we make our way through the Season of Eastertide by exploring Bible stories about people finding ways to cope with difficult situations. This Sunday we'll be revisiting Peter's denial of Jesus and how living with it affected his life.
- WEDNESDAY, April 22 @ 4:30pm - A virtual mini-retreat on the basics of spiritual practices. This session will focus on the practice of prayer walking.
- THURSDAY, April 23 @ 2pm - Virtual Community Office Hours. Let's consider together where we find God in the midst of all this upheaval and chaos in the Valley of Covid-19.

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Do something kind for someone else, and yourself. Wear your mask. Wash your hands. Again...
Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 36 (Saturday, April 18, 2020):

I woke up to a dusting of snow in my neighborhood this morning. Perhaps you did too. Just another point of confusion in an already confusing and unsettled time, or something else entirely? Here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

This is the view from my living room window this morning. I'm looking across the street at my neighbor's house and yard, the East Bay Bike Path just beyond, and the upper reaches of Bullock's Cove just beyond that. It's a lovely neighborhood and we feel very blessed to live here. As I have written in previous posts, this is an urban neighborhood - we're literally less than 10 minutes from downtown Providence - but we are also surrounded by natural beauty that is breathtaking at times. Like this morning. These trees just coming into bloom now have the additional beauty of being adorned, if only briefly, in these fairy tale mantles of snow. I especially like the juxtaposition with the still green and getting greener weeping willow visible behind them. Winter and Spring exquisitely portrayed in one photographic frame. Not that I'm any kind of photographer. Hah!! Not at all! More that I see God's hands at work in scenes like this, reminding me of the words of the 24th Psalm, "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it." I find such comfort in these words and others like them in the Scriptures here each day in our journey through the Valley of Covid-19. Perhaps you do too...

REALITY CHECK #1: You can look out your window on April 18 to find snow and NOT see God's handiwork anywhere in it. I know and appreciate that. I realize that for those of us who are not, shall we say, "snow people," seeing snow on the ground this late into April is just adding insult to injury. I hear you. With everything else we need to deal with at the moment, piling snow on top of it all (pun intended) feels just too over the top. The good news here is that, this too shall pass. The snow is already melting. Warmer weather is coming within the next couple of days. Spring is still here. It just is taking a few hours off to bid fond farewell to winter itself. Sort of a last hurrah...

REALITY CHECK #2: You still have plenty of time, it would seem, to tackle all those projects in the house that you promised you would get to now that you have so much extra time. But, let's be honest, most of them are probably still waiting to be tackled. Again, I hear you. I AM you. Peter and I did get the garage re-organized and that was on our list. But so many other things on our list still remain, staring at us every day, silently judging us with the unspoken question - "what about me?" coming at us from the yard, the boxes of photographs in the under the stairs storage closet, and so on, and so on. I'm not sure where the reluctance to keep working on all these projects is coming from but I think I'm starting to get a clue. What if we get all these projects done and there is still more time observing the current "safe at home" reality? What if we run out of stuff to do?? Scary just thinking about it! Better to let some things go for another day, just in case. Besides, there is that movie on tv today I've been wanting to watch...

REALITY CHECK #3: Whether you like snow or not, whether you're still ticking off all those "safe at home" projects or not, the days still pass by bringing all of us one day closer to the end of all this. Folks who will be guiding us through that process are now actively talking about how we all will begin moving back to normal, whatever the new normal might be. We are, in fact, getting there. We are one day closer to warm spring days, starry summer nights, and gratefully looking at all those projects we didn't have a chance to get to. That is a very, very good thing.

REMINDER: I hope you'll join me at one or more of the Facebook Live experiences UCC Westerly has planned in the days ahead:

- SUNDAY, April 19 @ 9:45am - Sunday Morning Worship as we make our way through the Season of Eastertide by exploring Bible stories about people finding ways to cope with difficult situations. This Sunday we'll be revisiting Peter's denial of Jesus and how living with it affected his life.

- WEDNESDAY, April 22 @ 4:30pm - A virtual mini-retreat on the basics of spiritual practices. This session will focus on the practice of prayer walking.
- THURSDAY, April 23 @ 2pm - Virtual Community Office Hours. Let's consider together where we find God in the midst of all this upheaval and chaos in the Valley of Covid-19.

SPECIAL NOTE ON THIS DAILY POST: In keeping with the advice I give here every day and to everyone I speak with, I will be practicing some self-care tomorrow morning and taking a break from writing this post so I can focus on preparing for the worship broadcast from my home at 9:45am. I would love to have you join me for that, either live or by watching the video sometime later that day. This IT IS WHAT IT IS post will return on Monday, April 20. Until then ...

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Do something kind for someone else, and yourself. Wear your mask. Wash your hands. Again...

Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 38 (Monday, April 20, 2020):

Another Monday begins here in the Valley of Covid-19 and things are starting to feel strained. Many of us were shocked over the weekend to see folks flocking to beaches that had been opened in Florida even as the Coronavirus numbers there soared. Equally confusing were protests in some state capitals raging against the whole notion of lock-downs and face masks as necessary to lower infection rates. In one case, protestors even attempted to prevent ambulances from reaching a hospital. Patience is wearing thin and nerves are definitely fraying, even for the majority of us on board with this dramatic and unprecedented crisis affecting literally every part of our lives. Here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

Today's photo is of a very unusual item from my mother's Victorian pattern glass collection. The pattern is "Three Face" and it was originated by the Duncan Miller Glass Company in Pennsylvania in the mid-19th century. This particular item is a salter. A salter is something which used to be an integral part of elegant Victorian table settings for a very formal dinner. Rather than having salt and pepper shakers on the table, each guest would receive their own personal "salter," a small glass dish which would have been filled with salt and usually accompanied by a tiny silver spoon. I find the three face pattern intriguing and very appropriate for our current reality which is growing more confusing by the day. Three face is an attempt to represent artistically in glass the reality of human behavior that often is inconsistent and even inexplicable. This is visible, at least to me, in the news reports about the crowded beaches in Florida and the protestors demanding an end

lock-down measures in some states. I confess to being totally confused by this seeming lack of understanding of the situation in which we find ourselves. Perhaps you are too...

REALITY CHECK #1: People are literally dying every day from the Coronavirus and it is very easily transmitted. So why are some people in such denial about it? Fear, anger, frustration are the most likely culprits and very understandable ones at that. No one likes what we are dealing with right now. No one, absolutely no one, is saying this morning, "Yay! Another day of lockdown!" Also, if the only Coronavirus positive people you know have had mild cases or even no symptoms, you might be tempted to think all of this is a gross over-reaction. Or, you might genuinely think if you are willing to risk getting sick, it's no one's business but your own. Unfortunately, this viewpoint does not recognize the individual's responsibility for getting others sick who don't feel the same way. So, how should we respond to these folks? Well, I would offer them a smile and perhaps a gentle response like, "I'm getting sick of all this too, but I wouldn't want to be responsible for making someone else sick who might die from this awful disease." It probably won't change their minds, but it might just help you ease yours.

REALITY CHECK #2: By now I think we are all aware of what some of us are rightfully calling the heroes of this pandemic, the people committed to helping all of us get through this unthinkable situation. These folks can be found all around the world, sewing face masks and going grocery shopping for folks who shouldn't go out at all. They are surely visible in all the folks still working on the front lines of potential infection every day, everyone from health care workers at every level to grocery store folks, to delivery folks and so on. Allow me to suggest to you yet another unlikely hero in our Valley of Covid 19 that I have recently discovered: John Krasinski's "Some Good News" weekly you-tube videos. They are amazing - fun and inspirational on every conceivable level. Most amazing to me is that John (from "The Office" and the "Jack Ryan" series on Amazon TV), uses all his Hollywood connections to bring much needed smiles to ordinary folks like you and me. If you haven't yet seen this, it is well worth your time as smiles and joy abound in these delightful videos.

REALITY CHECK #3: Every coping mechanism we employ for ourselves and to help others through this Valley of Covid 19 is accomplishing something vitally important, whether we realize it or not. Each and every way we all find to cope in the final analysis brings us one day closer to the end of all this. Yes, the end will most likely

be a gradual roll-back of restrictions but by the time we get the go-ahead for even little changes, we will be so happy and so grateful the celebrations will erupt spontaneously. So, dear ones, hang in there. We ARE getting there... one day at a time, one person at a time, one step at a time, one prayer at a time.

REMINDER: I hope you'll join me at one or more of the Facebook Live experiences UCC Westerly has planned in the days ahead:

- WEDNESDAY, April 22 @ 4:30pm - A virtual mini-retreat on the basics of spiritual practices. This session will focus on the practice of prayer walking.
- THURSDAY, April 23 @ 2pm - Virtual Community Office Hours. Let's consider together where we find God in the midst of all this upheaval and chaos in the Valley of Covid-19.

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Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 39 (Tuesday, April 21, 2020):

Here in the Valley of Covid-19 the days keep slipping by. And that's actually a pretty amazing thing. We don't have to think about it. We don't have to do anything to make it happen. One day just slides into another, taking us all along for the ride. We are more aware of this passage of time in our current Coronavirus "safe at home" reality and that is a very good thing, I think. Perhaps it's one of the blessings of this entire bizarre situation. Here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

I am including two photos with today's post for one very simple reason. The moments they attempt to capture took my breath away. The first one is of a spectacular sunset I witnessed over the Providence harbor last evening as I was going to pick up my son from work. The second one I took just this morning as the sunrise blazed through my living room windows, momentarily blinding me with its brilliance. One day sliding into another, with God's visible reminder through these spectacular, simple moments of the sun setting and rising again that we are not alone. These two photos remind me of a beautiful song that was all the rage at weddings in the 60's and 70's. It's from the Broadway musical *Fiddler on the Roof* (music by [Jerry Bock](#), lyrics by [Sheldon Harnick](#), and book by [Joseph Stein](#), 1964) and it seems so poignantly perfect to what we are experiencing at this moment. Here is a sample of the lyrics so much on my mind and heart as I write this today:

Sunrise, sunset, Swiftly flow the days.

Seedlings turn overnight to sunflowers, Blossoming even as we gaze.

Sunrise, sunset, Swiftly fly the years,

One season following another, Laiden with happiness and tears.

May you find moments of peace and reminders of all those whom you love as this day slips by.

REALITY CHECK #1: I read somewhere on Facebook recently about survival skills needed to make it through our period of quarantine or "safe at home," whichever descriptor you prefer. Here is my version of important things to do each day to keep your sanity and a strong sense of hope as this season of our lives unfolds: Get enough rest. Eat sensibly. Get outside. Do something physical to get your heart rate up. Find something beautiful to be grateful for. Find someone in need of a smile and give them yours. Be grateful for every single blessing, no matter how small. Be kind to everyone, especially the folks who make you crazy. Take a break when you need to from social media, from the news, even from your family when the need for peace and quiet for yourself becomes paramount and you will know when that is. Trust your gut on this one.

REALITY CHECK #2: Go on a scavenger hunt for beauty today. Where do you see beauty in the mundane things of life you've been staring at every day for over a month now. I'm betting they are there. You just don't see them anymore. Do this by literally walking outside of your home and then coming back inside, but this time cross your own threshold with new eyes and ears. Look past the clutter and any mess. Look for special memories locked up inside those things around your home. What are your favorite possessions? Why are they your favorites? Are they beautiful or simply special in spite of dings and wear and tear of daily life? Dear Ones, these special things punctuate your lives every day. Take time today to see them, to savor them, to give thanks for them. Approach today with an attitude of gratitude and see what a difference it can make.

REALITY CHECK #3: I was reading the newspaper (several in fact) online this morning before sitting down to write this and I was heartened to see that our Governors are starting to talk about our need to make plans for what it will be like to come back out of lockdown and engage in the work of rebuilding our lives. This is probably still weeks away, but it is finally being discussed at the highest levels, instead of the relentless spread of the Coronavirus. Such a significant reminder that every day that passes is truly another day closer to the end of all this.

REMINDER: I hope you'll join me at one or more of the Facebook Live experiences UCC Westerly has planned in the days ahead:

- WEDNESDAY, April 22 @ 4:30pm - A virtual mini-retreat on the basics of spiritual practices. This session will focus on the practice of prayer walking.
- THURSDAY, April 23 @ 2pm - Virtual Community Office Hours. Let's consider together where we find God in the midst of all this upheaval and chaos in the Valley of Covid-19. Please PM me or add to the comments on this post your thoughts in advance of this gathering so I will know what folks would like to hear me talk about. Thanks!!!

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Do something kind for someone else, and yourself. Wear your mask. Wash your hands. Again...
 Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 40 (Wednesday, April 22, 2020):

Happy Earth Day here in the Valley of Covid-19! I can't think of a happier respite from all things Coronavirus than a pause to honor God's gift of Creation all around us. Here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

Today's photo is one of members of UCC Westerly's Pollinator Team working with Dan Mullins of the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District to tend to our Rain Garden planted the year before on the upper church lawns. Rain gardens are plantings of native local species with particular root systems that do an excellent job of filtering out particulates in rain water run-off from parking lots. Our Rain Garden at UCC Westerly is just one of many gardens scattered throughout the property which reveal our church's commitment to doing our part to create healthy habitat for pollinators of all species, and by so doing making the environment

healthier for humans. This seems like an excellent photo to share here this day, the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. At the risk of revealing my age, I will admit that I was in high school when the first Earth Day was celebrated in 1970. It was a radical idea back then and, difficult as it is to believe, it is still a radical idea in some circles 50 years later. The notion behind Earth Day is simple. Every human being on the planet has a vested interest in keeping the planet and everything in it as healthy as possible. This means working to address issues such as air and water pollution, global warming and the threatened extinction of too many species who share this planet with us.

REALITY CHECK #1: Sadly, 50th Earth Day Anniversary events in our area and around the world are being sidelined along with so many other happy events in our Coronavirus dominated world. But, our efforts to celebrate this beautiful planet which is our home can still happen, if only on an individual scale. Since you're stuck at home anyway, why not spend a few minutes googling information on plants native to our area and where you can buy them? Then make some gardening plans of your own for this spring using this new information. I promise, this is a delightful way to spend a few hours, even if you don't consider yourself a "plant person."

REALITY CHECK #2: Don't have a garden? No problem! You can still nurture native plants in your apartment. Try growing some fresh herbs for your food, deepening your connection to how the earth feeds us all, with the help of pollinators of all sorts like bees and butterflies. Step outside as dusk is falling to listen for the peepers' song, proof positive that nearby wetlands are healthy. Take a walk through your neighborhood and look for signs that the land you barely notice each day is healthy and nurtured. Take a trash bag with you and pick up some trash. Healthy activity for you and the planet! You might be surprised how this little change of pace is just what we need at this point in the Valley of Covid-19.

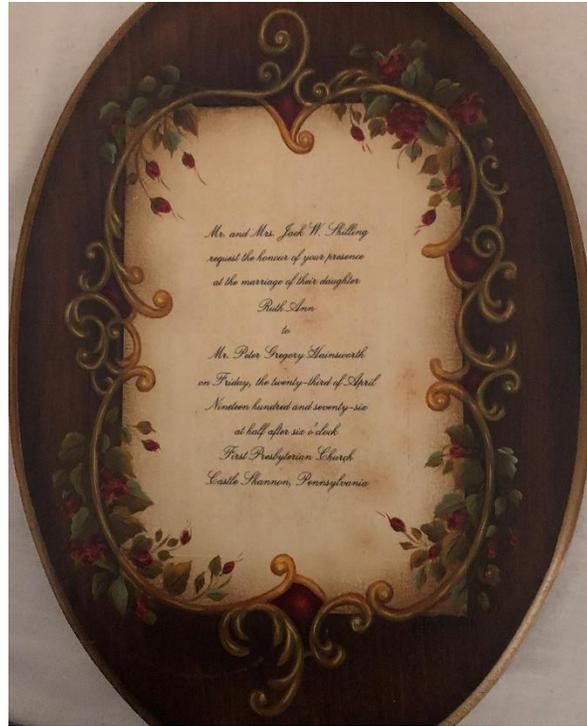
REALITY CHECK #3: Still and all, as we chafe at the restrictions we are now growing so tired of; and as we worry a little more each day about the financial implications of all this, it still true that at the end of the day, we are truly and definitely one day closer to the end of all this. How and when all this will end remains to be determined, but that it *will* end is beyond dispute. In the meantime, Happy Earth Day!!!

REMINDER: I hope you'll join me at one or more of the Facebook Live experiences UCC Westerly has planned in the days ahead:

- TODAY, April 22 @ 4:30pm - A virtual mini-retreat on the basics of spiritual practices. This session will focus on the practice of prayer walking.
- THURSDAY, April 23 @ 2pm - Virtual Community Office Hours. Let's consider together where we find God in the midst of all this upheaval and chaos in the Valley of Covid-19. Please PM me or add to the comments on this post your thoughts in advance of this gathering so I will know what folks would like to hear me talk about. Thanks!!!
- SUNDAY, April 26 @ 9:45am - Our Sunday Morning Worship At Home Facebook Live experience. Worship resources are available on our Facebook page and website the day before. This week will be considering Jesus' parable of the barren fig tree in celebration of Earth Day. Come on, who doesn't want to hear a bible story that includes manure...

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Do something kind for someone else, and yourself. Wear your mask. Wash your hands. Again...

Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 41 (Thursday, April 23, 2020):

Life goes on here in the Valley of Covid-19. Birthdays and anniversaries still show up on the calendar. They remind us starkly of all that we can and cannot do to mark these special occasions as we practice social distancing on these days when the last thing we want to do is be distant from the people we love. Here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

Today's photo is of my wedding invitation, decoupage to a wooden plaque and hand painted with exquisite decorations capturing the floral and color scheme of my wedding. If your eyesight is especially keen and you can read the filigreed script on this plaque you will realize that today is Peter's and my 44th wedding anniversary. It also happens to be the birthday of our one and only grandson who was the best possible anniversary gift two years ago today. So, this plaque which hangs in our bedroom is our constant reminder of just how much life we have experienced together since that day so long ago. We've raised two amazing kids while negotiating more than a few household moves and job changes. We've buried our parents, our dads too soon and our moms at the end of long, happy lives. We've witnessed the world change from the wild and carefree days of the psychedelic 70's to the "me first" 80's and 90's to the "what the heck is going on anyhow" 21st century we're already two decades into. We watched friends go off to Vietnam

and then the 1st Gulf War and now have a niece still serving in the Army in the never-ending conflicts of the Middle East. We sobbed through 9/11 and now we shelter in place through the Coronavirus pandemic. We've experienced a lot of life together, Peter and me. I am richly blessed, I know, to have such an amazing life partner, even on the days when he makes me nuts. My hope and prayer for you this day is that you have now or at some point in your life been richly blessed by the love and companionship of another person willing to share your life in all its beauty and ugliness. Perhaps a spouse or maybe a really close friend or sibling you can't imagine life without. On this day in the Valley of Covid-19, one thing we have learned is that, in the end, love is what matters the most. Love is what carries us through. May your life be filled with love in all its glory, this day and always.

REALITY CHECK #1: As I vividly remember on this day, weddings are stressful. Incredibly stressful, as is any big occasion for which you are responsible for the well-being of many guests. I can only imagine the angst of folks enduring this Coronavirus lock-down with a wedding or a milestone birthday or anniversary on the horizon. If this is your dilemma at the moment, here's a tiny bit of advice: Enjoy the day anyway. It's not about how many people can be there or how fancy the cake is or how beautiful the flowers are. It's about the love this event embodies whether it's a wedding or an anniversary or a birthday. The people you love and who love you will find a way to make this occasion special. And when someone else is facing a Coronavirus restricted celebration, you can do the same for them! Then the only question is - just how creative can you be???

REALITY CHECK #2: I think it's worth noting that our sojourn here in the Valley of Covid-19 is allowing us to experience both extremes of what it is to love our families. If we are in lock-down WITH our families, we might find ourselves at this moment longing to be somewhere, anywhere, else but with this same group of people who, though dear to us, are now wearing a little thin with their never-ending presence and all that comes with it. If we are in lock-down AT A DISTANCE from our families we are missing them sharply, wondering when we will finally have a moment to share a hug and a good, long conversation while sitting next to each other not social distancing. Funny how our lives these days can be both/and. Your thoughts???

REALITY CHECK #3: On this day as I celebrate my 45th wedding anniversary and can still vividly remember tearing apart my bedroom an hour before my wedding because I couldn't find the white bobby-pins to hold my Juliet-cap veil on my head,

I am keenly aware of how quickly the days since that day have flown by. So too are the days in this Valley of Covid-19. They seem to be crawling by, I know. But at some point, many years hence, you will be able to look back at this experience and truthfully say, the days did go by more quickly than you thought they would. Dear ones, we ARE one day closer to that happy future day.

REMINDER: I hope you'll join me at one or more of the Facebook Live experiences UCC Westerly has planned in the days ahead:

- TODAY, April 23 @ 2pm - Virtual Community Office Hours. Let's consider together where we find God in the midst of all this upheaval and chaos in the Valley of Covid-19. Please PM me or add to the comments on this post your thoughts in advance of this gathering so I will know what folks would like to talk about. Thanks!!!
- SUNDAY, April 26 @ 9:45am - Our Sunday Morning Worship At Home Facebook Live experience. Worship resources are available on our Facebook page and website the day before. This week we will be considering Jesus' parable of the barren fig tree in celebration of Earth Day. Come on, who doesn't want to hear a bible story that includes manure...

Whatever you do today, keep smiling. Do something kind for someone else, and yourself. Wear your mask. Wash your hands. Again...

Holding you in prayer, Rev. Ruth



Day 42 (Friday, April 24, 2020):

Another rainy, gloomy day here in the Valley of Covid-19. Not very helpful to many of us struggling with so many worries and fears. When the grayness of the weather matches the grayness of our moods, it can be even more challenging as we try to make our way through this pandemic experience and the destruction of our lives it leaves in its wake. Here is today's installment of IT IS WHAT IT IS.

Some of you may recognize what this is a photo of. If not, allow me to explain. It is a dreamcatcher. Dreamcatchers are found in some Native American cultures and are made of willow hoops to which sacred items like beads and feathers are added. Originally used as a charm to hang over the beds of infants, dreamcatchers have made their way into American culture. I received my first dreamcatcher years ago as a gift from a friend and, at that time, it was explained to me as being a charm to catch and hold bad dreams so they won't disturb your sleep. I have no idea whether or not this is true to the original Native American culture which created them and, if not, my sincere apologies to those First Peoples who are unhappy when their culture is appropriated by outsiders. That is not my intent and I give honor and respect to the First Peoples who created this item which has become so meaningful in my own life. I share this photo here today as an expression of concern and solidarity for all those who are grieving the threat of loss and the loss itself of the dreams around which they have built their lives. In particular, I am thinking of all those hundreds of small business owners in our

community whose very existence is now under serious threat because of this prolonged lockdown preventing them from running their businesses. You know who they are. Restaurants, hair and nail salons, gyms and personal trainer practices, retail shops of all sizes, ice cream parlors - the list goes on and on. Where are these folks to find hope in the midst of dreams becoming nightmares?

REALITY CHECK #1: Of all the people impacted by the Coronavirus during this pandemic, small business owners come second only to families touched by the serious illness and deaths of loved ones as we consider the reality of lives shattered in what feels like an instant. It hurts when dreams and the hearts which birthed them are broken as so many are being right now. There is little anyone can do to ease that very real pain other than acknowledge its presence. Government assistance is out there but difficult to access and limited in scope. This too is real. So what can we, your friends and neighbors do for you in this moment? Support your businesses however it is still possible for sure. Easy to know for restaurants still offering take-out but what of the rest of you? Please use the comments section after this post to tell us how we can help. We can't promise to solve everything for you, but we will do what we can.

REALITY CHECK #2: We all have dreams that have been shattered by this Coronavirus pandemic. And so many of those broken dreams will never be recovered. Proms, graduations, Senior nights and awards banquets, family milestone celebrations like weddings, anniversaries and birthdays, vacations long planned - the list is endless. The pain of their loss is genuine and all too real. And what is to be done about it? It is true that some dreams are gone forever anchored as they are to specific times and places which can never be replicated. All that remains then is to replace these broken dreams with new ones and what better time to begin creating the plans for those new dreams than now. Have fun! Be creative! The sky's the limit! Maybe your dreams will be so grand that they will need to remain dreams and that's okay, as long as they pull you up and away from the shadow of the broken ones gone forever. And who knows? Maybe those incredible, unbelievable, impossible new dreams will become reality after all. As the folks in my church have heard me say a thousand times, with God all things are possible...

REALITY CHECK #3: Shattered dreams and new ones litter the pathway we must walk through this Valley of Covid-19. Still, we are one day closer to the day when new dreams are birthed into reality as our new normal slowly takes shape. Hold on

tight to your dreams as you mark the days pass. Let them carry you through the gloomy days and long nights when worry and fear threaten to overwhelm. We will not be stuck in this mess forever. Let your dreams be your lifeline to the future.

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- SUNDAY, April 26 @ 9:45am - Our Sunday Morning Worship At Home Facebook Live experience. Worship resources are available on our Facebook page and website the day before. This week we will be considering Jesus' parable of the barren fig tree in celebration of Earth Day. Come on, who doesn't want to hear a bible story that includes manure?
- You can access videos of prior Facebook Live events like worship, Spiritual Practices and Virtual Community Office Hours on the church website anytime. 😊

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