good morning No good morning and welcome to worship with the Grosse Pointe Memorial Church family on this fourth Sunday of Lent we have been observing a whole and holy Lent loving and loving others and caring for ourselves wherever you are whatever connection you have with this community of faith we are grateful you have joined us as Reverend Marc deal our interim pastor and I look out at what appears to be an empty sanctuary this morning we are imagining you gathered in your homes preparing to worship God with us as we embark on our second live stream service once again proving that technology and the Holy Spirit are indeed a mighty team my name is Susan Modena and I am the minister for adult education here at Memorial Church it is my pleasure to join Reverend deal this morning as we lead worship on your behalf the bulletin and the order of worship have been made available on our website if you are following along please note that we are not singing our hymns this morning later you may find on the home page of our website Jim berry our minister of music singing fairest Lord Jesus which is one of our hymns for today he has invited you to use your bulletin for the printed him and sing along with him later when you have a moment I plan to do that when I get home and I hope you will do it in your own homes as well a few announcements this morning the church building will be closed through Wednesday if you need help because of quarantine or sickness or if you have other pastoral concerns please know that you can call the church and follow the prompt to contact the pastor on call please see the bulletins for Facebook our web site and emails from the church for the schedule of various educational activities which are happening via technology finally we want to speak briefly again as we did last week about the current situation at Grosse Pointe Memorial Church the decisions we have made and will continue to make are not based on either fear or bravado on wishful thinking or merely on the basis of self-protection the present pandemic as you well know by now is a healthcare crisis with very specific Public Health protocols that are proven to contain and mitigate the transition the transmission of the virus and to limit the impact of this disease on our society and on our world most especially on those who are most vulnerable our love of God and our love of neighbor require us to act in the interest of all especially the most fragile and exposed among us we thank you very much very sincerely for your understanding of the precautionary steps we have taken and that we will continue to take as long as they are necessary now gathered wherever we are this morning as one in the body of Christ please join me in our call to worship we are called to love God and so we come offering our prayers of thanks and praise we are called to love others and so we come offering our gifts of kindness and mercy we are called to love ourselves and so we come offering this time for reflection and inspiration we come to worship God with our whole selves heart and soul and mind and strength please join me now in our prayer of confession which will be followed by a time of silent confession let us pray together faithful God you shower us with your love and mercy we confess that we have been stingy with our love clenched and anxious we have seen the needs of others but turned away in apathy we have made decisions from selfish motives and carelessly hurt others in the process have mercy on us Lord and transform our lives so that we may be your generous people with open hands and open hearts amen I am reading for you now the Curia which is in the bulletin if you'd like please join with me lord have mercy upon us Christ have mercy upon us lord have mercy upon us the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting in the name of Jesus Christ we are forgiven restored and set free thanks be to God whether you are sitting by yourself in your home or whether family is gathered around you whatever situation which you find yourselves right now this is the time when we want to share the peace with one another I am looking at our empty sanctuary and I am and imagining us gathered here again sharing the peace shaking hands hugging one another in whatever way is comfortable for us when that time is right with that vision in your mind's eye let us now share the peace with one another in this season of reflection and contemplation which we receive God's gift of peace may the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with each and every one of you and also with you [Music] if you have the bulletin in front of you please join me in the prayer for illumination that can be found on page three let us pray speaker of truth and source of all that is good illumine our minds and understanding that as the Scriptures are read and proclaimed we may see what is good and right and true and do what is pleasing in your sight amen this morning our scripture passages have been changed from what they what were published my first reading this morning is going to come from the New Testament from Romans the eighth chapter verses 35 through 39 here now the word of God from this portion of Holy Scripture who will separate us from the love of Christ will hardship or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword as it is written for your sake we are being killed all day long we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered no in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us for I am convinced that neither death nor life nor Angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord and from the psalms psalm ten beginning with verse one and reading through verses eighteen why o lord do you stand far off why do you hide yourself in times of trouble and arrogance the wicked persecute the poor let them be caught in the schemes they have devised for the wicked boast of the desires of their heart those greedy for gain curse and renounce the Lord and the pride of their countenance the wicked say God will not seek it out all their thoughts are there is no God there ways prosper at all times your judgments are on high out of their sight as for their foes they scoff at them they think in their heart we shall not be moved throughout all generations we shall not meet adversity their mouths are filled with cursing and deceit and oppression under their tongues or mischief and iniquity they sit in ambush in the villages in hiding places they murder the innocent their eyes stealthily watch for the helpless they lurk in secret like a lion in its covert they lurk that they may seize the poor they seize the poor and drag them off in their nets they stood they crouched in the helpless fall by their might they think in their heart God has forgotten he has hidden his face he will never see it rise up o Lord o God lift up your hand do not forget the oppressed why do the wicked renounce God and say in their hearts you will not call us to account but you do you see indeed you note trouble and grief that you may take it into your hands the helpless commit themselves to you you have been the helper of the orphan break the arm of the wicked and evil doers seek out their wickedness until you find none the Lord is king forever and ever the nations shall perish from his land Oh Lord you will hear the desire of the meek you will strengthen their heart you will incline your ear to do justice for the orphan and the oppressed so that for those from Earth may strike terror no more the word of the Lord thanks be to God who of us have not been consumed by the new reality of kovat 19 and at this pandemic schools canceled gatherings prohibited food and product shortages every sniffle examined for symptomatology each ache raising anxiety tempers shortened and long stretches of unstructured time with no place to go uncertainty and fear characterized this moment for so many of us the moment I had planted this sermon I had planned for today has been tossed aside in favor of this one I think you would have preferred the one you are not hearing and preparing for this sermon and weighing a message to communicate I was torn between two very basic human needs hope and truth the needs of hope and truth resonate with and are particularly suited for communities of faith in this moment of time I believe you cannot have one without the other hope and truth are intimately and inextricably connected rosy predictions of America being spared the ravages of an epidemic have left us unprepared and vulnerable when statements are made unrelated to the truth we are given false hope you and I don't need more of that into guise of religion the values we have pursued and extolled for decades we find hollow in the this present moment political power at the highest levels of government Fame and celebrity sports stars in the lifestyle of the super-rich none provides protection or salvation in this moment the superheroes of today are the ones who have always been there but we ignored caregivers and nurses technicians and researchers in medicine and Technology school teachers and workers on production lines custodians and sexton's cleaning streets and businesses and homes moms and dads caring neighbors cashiers at grocery stores and pharmacies restaurant cooks and staff preparing food up until this moment we have showered the wrong people with too many accolades while underpaying those who make our world work the church is at fault as much as anyone now human connection and caring and sacrifice and hard work and knowledge and love have taken center stage this pandemic has laid us bare and tossed our shiny but worthless values into a crumpled heap before the advent of the corona virus every person I know had a plate full of challenges and sand stressors and desperations the pandemic only complicates them aging parents who need assistance chronically ill children or spouses meeting payroll deadlines making tuition and housing payments putting food on the table for the kids initiating new business ventures or executing business plans for the next six months finding brief vacation respite from the unrelenting pressures of life and now add to all of that the coronavirus with its complications and its demands and its uncertainties and its limitations of how life can be conducted this acute crisis overlays the chronic in long suffering concerns all of us had prior to its arrival I don't know about you but I am tired and worn out and this nightmare has just begun do we have the resilience and patience and stamina for the long haul and so I turn to the scriptures for help I turn to listen maybe there I will find hope and encouragement maybe some light will shine upon the shadowed paths of the present moments and in the voice of the psalmist in Psalm 10 we hear these words wael or do you stand far off why do you hide yourself in times of trouble I don't think that's what I was looking for that is not happy talk it is not the language of positive thinking can't I find something more comforting instead in those words I hear the same desperation I feel and shockingly its message does not distress me perhaps I'm too overwhelmed to be disquieted I find comfort in these words a person of faith from millennia past knew my experience and in the face of his or her own desperation felt no need to reach for easy reassurance or live words or cheap grace in the midst of tragedy easy assurances that eventually all will be okay do not sit well in the 14th century all would be ok that was true for the Black Plague in 7 years after its beginning indeed the plague did subside we would rather not know that it left 50 million dead in its destruction Warren's words intoned by the pious fear not glibly offered because the speaker is in a state of denial or their circumstances are decidedly different than yours and mine they have all the resources in the world available to them if they knew the reality in which many of us live with jobs lost and bills to pay in bank accounts empty and health insurance gone they would be afraid please please do not offer cheap grace in a time of crisis it only makes us wary of the sources from which it comes for 13 verses the psalmist vents his spleen at adversity and unfairness and injustice could the psalmist not summon up in two verses instead move to hope and resolution for God's sake but for God's sake and ours the psalmist will not for four hundred years the children of Israel endured increasing oppression in Egypt for 40 years they wandered in the wilderness for 70 years they existed in exile for generations they waited for the Messiah to appear in our attention shortened media-driven world what do you and I know about resilience and patience and stamina we want to learn if we want to learn about such things we should turn to communities of color with their deep and long experience who in extended periods of trouble have learned love and forgiveness and keeping on in the face of injustice and Prejudice and deprivation yet today those same communities from which we should learn will more likely be demonized and scapegoated as the reason for our troubles for the psalmist only after the hard realities are faced and the doubts are aired and the truly guilty are fingered does complaint give way to hope be sure that a reckoning will finally come only then is certainty expressed that God does indeed see and God no longer hides and when God sees salvation will come and healing will flow and injustice will be righted and good will prevail the church remains short-sighted already I hear leaders in faith communities bemoaning the loss of Holy Week worship and Easter celebrations I had spoken similar words now pastors hope against hope that Christmas will not be interrupted this year we sound more like retailers desperately trying to salvage our bottom line than people of faith preparing to join the battle against this pandemic the present reality presses us for a better hope based on truth that hope and truth in this is in this moment in time not some unknown time in the future but now we embody the love of God now the hope and truth is that today our actions reflect the victory of life and the face of death People of God we must not wait for weeks to live into the reality of Easter People of God we must not wait until December for the incarnation of Jesus to take form in the way we respond today either today is our Christmas incarnation and today is our Easter dawn when faith encounters our world in its present crisis or our faith is as hollow as the ballot use that guided us astray and many are not waiting tables are being set up and streets with grocery groceries for people to take restaurants and many towns are providing lunch for every canceled school day of the week to any child regardless of their income bars and diners are providing meals for out-of-work hospitality workers breweries are now making hand sanitizer the auto industry is looking to retool the production lines to manufacture ventilators small businesses and grooves and individuals are sewing surgical masks for health care workers and hospitals people at grosse pointe memorial are stepping up they are volunteering to check on the isolated to provide care and groceries to those quarantined or sick some of our members plan to take any governmental funds they may receive and direct it to others in dire financial situations others are organizing grocery and food distribution some have begun to examine ways to assist the homeless and hungry in our community their actions are tied directly to the hope and truth demanded by the reality of this present moment in time they are the incarnation of Christ in this world now they are life overcoming the forces of death today they are not thinking of Easter and Christmas in the future no they are being Easter and Christmas today and when I see hope and truth marshaled together in such a fashion I am assured that God sees and healing and salvation will come to the orphan and Widow to all God's people into this world that god holds precious and loves as we move through this time people will find many avenues of healing and salvation to utilize we will rediscover the well-worn paths of old that have lifted and sustained the human sphere music and song poetry and all forms of writing art and dance nature and its majesty we must resist dividing the human family into squabbling camps we must stay unified together in all of this hope and truth will lead us to experience salvation in this difficult time in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit please join me now in a time of prayer let us pray gracious God we praise your Holy Name Father Son and Holy Spirit on this clear and chilly early spring morning we praise you for the beauty of your creation and for the signs of life which we are beginning to see and hear in our neighborhoods we confess dear Lord that we slide from time to time in certain moments that can catch us by surprise into the dark places of worry letting our sadness and our fear for ourselves and our loved ones overwhelm our trust in you forgive us we pray for not remaining open at all times to the light of your steadfast love to your promise to always be with us that nothing in all of creation can separate us from your love increase Jesus our Lord and Savior Lord of all times Lord of all generations we give you thanks for our ancestors in the faith who have faced enormous challenges doing what needed to be done keeping the faith in the face of seemingly overwhelming challenges through two world wars which engulfed this globe through the depths of a great and frightening depression through the very real fear of nuclear annihilation we are their heirs Great God they have provided us with examples of selfless service and magnificent courage we remember them now we give you thanks holy God for all of those who are not remaining in the safety of their homes but who are venturing out each day into situations of risk to take care of strangers who are ill those who are maintaining our public services all of those whose job it is to show up and do important work who are now putting themselves at unusual risk we think of them now those we know personally and those whose names are unknown to us loving God we pray for ourselves we pray for our loved ones we pray for our community our nation and our entire world in this season of Lent where we are called to be whole in body mind and spirit we are called to be whole may we show by how we love you by how we love one another and by how we care for ourselves in all the right ways may we show that we know of your love we know of your incarnation in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and that we know because of our faith in the resurrection that Christ lives with us now through the power of the Holy Spirit may we show by all that we do that that is what we believe we pray all of this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior who taught us when we pray to say our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name thy kingdom come they will be done on earth as it is in heaven give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory amen we are so grateful that you have joined us in worship this morning this worship service will be available recorded after this time after we shut down this particular video and streaming it will be available online and you may refer others to this on our web page and people in our community will have access to this I want to thank Joe Masonic our video and IT technician and volunteer who has helped make this possible I also want to thank Susan Medina for her liturgy and her expressions of faith in leading us all in worship this day now go forth into the world in peace be of good courage hold fast that which is good render no one evil for evil strengthen the faint-hearted support the weak help the afflicted honored all people love and serve the Lord rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit and the blessing of God Almighty Father Son and Holy Spirit be you now and forever oh man