



101 Randolph St.  
Thomasville, NC 27360  
336-472-7718

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**Rev. Rodney Denton**  
**Friday March 20, 2020**

Good morning everyone!

So, this is Day 2 of our “new normal” **10 @ 10 daily devotions** from Memorial UMC, in Thomasville, NC! **My name is Rodney Denton** and I am the Minister of Youth and Young Adults here at Memorial!

**I want to thank Rev. Danny Leonard for his thoughts yesterday** as he took a look at Noah and how “God will always remember us”. Even in the wake of a world-cleansing **flood**, even in the midst of a Viral pandemic, no matter where you are in life, what you are up against, no matter how uncertain the future appears, God will remember you! That is a good thing to always keep in mind, but especially during what's going on in our world today!

The truth is, we need the comfort of knowing that we are not alone. We need the faith that God is present with us no matter how abandoned we might feel. We need to know that there is HOPE.

In fact Danny's words reminded of how a few days ago, my mom had run out of milk and eggs, she had plenty of food, **but the anxiety in her voice** over the phone motivated me to offer to get her needed supplies, so I ran to the grocery store for her **so she wouldn't be exposed to the Virus** and dropped the items off at her house.

Unfortunately, I could not have anticipated how the end result of my good deed would end so traumatically! As I pulled in the driveway with the **prize of the Food Lion grocery bag**, with all its much-needed necessities, I got out of the car and triumphantly handed her the bag.

Then she looked over my shoulder into my truck and **that is where things started to go downhill**. You see, my mom is a very social person and she had been stuck in her house with **no interaction at the YMCA** and **no connection at church** all weekend AND of course, since my kids were out of school, I had brought them along for the ride (**ENTER THE KIDS**) and of course she saw them and immediately said, “Ya’ll come in for a while.”

And I immediately began thinking of the **social distancing protocols** and **limiting virus exposure** to people of a certain age, and I said "Mom, they can't they are like walking Petri dishes full of germs and grossness." **(DEACON & DAELYN LEAVE)** I told her I just watched Gracen, my oldest, licking the side of his Sprite bottle we had just gotten at Subway and he was biting his fingernails on the way over here. There is no chance that I am going to be the cause of you getting exposed to the Virus! **(GRACEN LEAVES)**

Of course, that was not good enough and the more she protested, the more I had to say "No" and as the tears began to well up in her eyes, I began feeling more and more like a BIG JERK! We finally got out of there with blowing kisses and a newfound respect for people living on their own through this situation. We have also tried to begin a new tradition of Facetime-ing Nana at night. That seems to help.

So, with this in mind, I want to talk with you today about --- priorities!!! (Show the toilet paper). I am sure you have heard by now some of the crazy stories of hoarding and attempts to take advantage of this desperate situation. From Costco running out toilet paper, Clorox and Lysol, to hand sanitizer being sold for \$80 a bottle, I have become aware of some of the worst examples of humanity that exists.

For some, a *priority* might be turning an easy buck in the face of a worldwide pandemic. HOWEVER, I have also become aware of so many great examples of charity and compassion during this time as well. Certainly, the doctors, nurses and medical staff that are exposing themselves to the virus and wearing themselves out working long hours to take care of very sick patients are examples of people who have their priorities in the right place, but I have also heard about landlords altering or even absolving rent payments for their tenants, neighbors who are reaching out to elderly strangers to make grocery runs and medication deliveries, the teachers who are trying to keep students on track by creating more work for themselves to make sure their students don't fall behind (of course *homework* may be more commendable depending on which side of it you find yourself on on, and I have found out through this ordeal that I'm not so sure that I have the unique temperament to be a homeschool teacher).

Anyway, other folks that have shown remarkable priorities during this time has been... I have heard of Whiskey distilleries converting their operations to make hand sanitizer and NBA players paying the salaries of the arena workers where they play, and these are just the few stories that have reached my relatively sheltered world over the last few days. I am sure there are many, many more.

My point is that situations like the one our world finds itself in today tends to reveal what is most important in our lives, what priorities we hold to be sacred in our lives. If your knee-jerk reaction, when faced with an overwhelming circumstance, is to buy up 18,000 bottles of hand sanitizer, creating a market shortage, then trying to re-sell them at a tremendous mark up, then there might be something askew about your priorities, however, if your reaction to the coronavirus is "How can I help someone else out?" Then keep your eyes open because a situation just might present itself.

With all of this in mind, I am reminded about a passage in Philippians Chapter 6, Verses 6-8. It is generally agreed upon that this passage was written by Paul while he was in prison, which I find sort of interesting, given our current state of uncertainty in the world and how for some, self-quarantine has become sort of a prison of its own, but Paul shares from his confinement:

#### **PHILIPPIANS 4:6-8**

***6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.***

What a beautiful passage! Paul is encouraging his readers to focus on priorities that are good and pure and promote community and love among one another. I find this passage truly inspiring, especially at this time.

In fact, yesterday I got a phone call from my Father-in-Law. It was sort of out of the blue. In fact, when I saw it was him, I sort had a moment of panic, because we seldom call one another just to “chat”. So, I wasn’t sure what he was calling about. As it turned out, he was just calling to check on me and to see how I was handling the effects of the Virus. After I hung up from this rather short exchange, I considered that through all of the anxiety that Coronavirus has churned up and all the events that have caused me fear and doubt about our world and in humanity in general, there continues to be a constant ray of hope that everything is going to be OK. Moments of grace and clarity that help me see God’s hand at work in this world. It is a reminder that we are all called to join God to make this world a better place. It might be small matters like calling people that you don’t regularly call, or going to visit someone who is self-quarantined and talking to them safely through a window. I even saw a video of a guy in a urban area who had dragged his piano out to his balcony and began to play, then a second person joined in, playing a saxophone from an adjacent building! What a beautiful example of building community even in the midst of being physically separated!

When I set out to write this devotion, I had had enough of the Coronavirus and of the fear and anxiety that it is causing in this world. I even thought at one point that maybe I shouldn’t mention it at all. But I find that it has become such a massive part of our lives it would be irrelevant not to at least acknowledge it, and here I am at the end of my devotion finding that this stupid virus has practically become the focal point of all of my words. But I’m OK with that, because even though this virus may have brought out the worst in some of us, it has just as powerfully pulled out the *best* in so many more of us. There is strength in numbers and regardless if we are on the frontlines fighting this virus directly, or we are finding ways to support one another by social distancing and slowing the spread of the virus, and trying to maintain some semblance of normalcy, we are all in this together. I guess it sort of boils down to a choice, a decision to prioritize ***“whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy...”*** or

not. When we prioritize the right things for the right reasons, we end up building community by sharing in the same spirit. God draws us together because we have the same priorities and we share in the same hope for what comes next.

I want to leave you with a quote from American author, Anne Lamott that I think sort of connects with me and the approach that I believe will help us in the coming days and months as we more clearly understand what we are up against and how we can help one another through this difficult time. She says, ***“Hope begins in the dark, the stubborn hope that if you just show up and try to do the right thing, the dawn will come. You wait and watch and work: you don’t give up.”*** Here's to YOU not giving up!

Have a great day and join us for worship on Sunday at 10 AM!!!, then next week we will continue these 10 @ 10 devotions!

