

We've Been Here Before Spiritual Guidance for Enduring Coronavirus



As we begin to cancel plans and hunker down, this time of physical distancing and perhaps soon-to-be communal self-quarantine, **brings to mind the sister of Moses, Miriam, in the Hebrew Scriptures, Book of Numbers Chapter 12.**

Just as the people of Israel in their sojourn through the desert for 40 years were in transition, **we are a faith community in transition. We find ourselves to be in a kind of wilderness as were the People of Israel, God's Chosen People, our sisters and brothers in faith.**

Travel plans canceled, classes suspended, schools closed, in-person gatherings postponed, can't go to the movies, favorite coffee shop, church, etc.

The understandable fear of infection and the advice we hear to **"flatten the curve"** - **another phrase now part of our lexicon** - forces us to quarantine ourselves ("**shelter in place**") hunker down, and wait, though for how long, we don't know.

In the **12th chapter of the Book of Numbers, Miriam** becomes infected with a scaly, white, and highly contagious skin condition. Miriam the prophet - "the singer of new songs" to God - must cease her ministry to protect herself and her community. She quarantines herself outside the camp.

What did the Israelite community, by then millions strong, do when a plague of unknown proportions entered their midst? **They stopped traveling, hunkered down, and observed a period of quarantine.**

We seem to be doing the same thing. But what happened? This part of the Hebrew Scriptures says little about what they did during that painful period, and we hear nothing about Miriam's suffering, though we can imagine it was significant.

This portion of scripture is also silent about the worry of those who came into contact with Miriam before and at the start of her infection. We don't know how they passed the time, whether they interacted with others or stayed home in their tents. **We know only that they made camp, stopped moving, and waited. We don't know, but they seemed to have cooperated with one another for the COMMON GOOD!**

We know, too, that Miriam's brother Moses, a leader of our people, cried out to God - **Healer of All** - with a very brief and heart-wrenching prayer: ***"Please, God, please heal her!"***

Asking for healing, Moses twice begs the Holy One, doubling the word - PLEASE - to emphasize the intensity of his desire. We imagine him falling to his knees, worried and fearful, bent low by the twin burdens of keeping his community safe and seeking healing for his beloved sister, his partner in leadership. **Like him, we pray now: *"Please, God, please heal us."***

But our prayer should not end there. From outside our "camps," hidden in our homes, we imagine the actions of our ancestors in faith:

The Chosen People held strong and courageous listening to the voice of

Miriam, from outside the camp, singing songs of hope and healing. **What are your words of hope for your family and friends?**

We imagine the other women in the camp, taking up their timbrels, creating a song of hope, as Miriam did before her quarantine, the world's **first livestreamed liturgy of song**. **Are you able with social media to send out a message/prayer/song of hope?**

We imagine that the people arranged the sharing of resources and comforted the confused and the anxious. **How do you comfort those who are anxious or afraid?** Or are you, as well, quite anxious thinking only about making that next trip to Albertsons or Smith's? It's only human to be anxious.

Life went on, for Moses and Miriam, and God's Chosen People, though separated by physical distancing they continue to connect socially somehow. Just as we must in the 21st-century.

We'll never know what went on in the Israelite camp when a plague of unknown proportions threatened the very survival of the people. But imagining, we can see it all clearly: People planned and played, shared and continued to live with love and hope. They told stories and sang songs, creating social connection amidst the physical distance. And healing came to Miriam, finally.

Though we never learn whether others were infected or died of the disease, sadly we imagine that too many did - and that when they did, the community buried their dead with honor and love.

Then, breathing a deep sigh, they packed up and moved on. And eventually, we will, too. With our faith intact.