

**The Reverend Jon Hauerwas - March 29, 2020**  
**Doing the Impossible**  
**Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16 and Matthew 9:18-26**

In an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19, medical professionals and elected leaders are insisting that we remain at least six feet apart. Doing so, we are told, will help combat a particularly contagious enemy that we cannot see. Collectively, we understand how important these efforts are. Around the world, people are seeking to meet an unprecedented threat with an unprecedented response.

And so, in two short weeks, our lives have changed dramatically. Best practices are now described using words that are understandably harsh. Quarantine and isolation leave little to the imagination. And while other phrases were designed to take some of the edge off, the intention remains the same. Whether you prefer to call it social distancing, limitation on movement, or shelter-in-place, we're still referring to daily restrictions on the kinds of personal freedoms that we have long taken for granted.

Here in Akron, government mandates have resulted in the closing of local schools. As a result, our home is now more chaotic. Our two active boys can no longer run freely at the soccer field, go hiking with friends, or bounce for hours at a trampoline park. Because temperatures have been cooler, we haven't been outside

much. In the confines of our home, the reminders have been constant. “Inside voices, boys. No yelling. We’re all in here together.” We share a universal desire with all parents for spring to come quickly so that we can shift our energy and focus outdoors, if only to the backyard.

I recognize that these are merely inconveniences. Far more difficult than parenting in the era of social distancing is being completely isolated as a result of it. At nursing care facilities, residents are asked to stay in their rooms where meals are brought to their doors. Cherished time in the dining hall or at the card table will have to wait.

None of this is easy because humans are inherently social creatures. We long for connection. We thrive in relationships. And when our movements are restricted, we feel cut off from others. So while we may willingly adhere to social distancing practices, with the knowledge that these methods are in the best interest of all, it still hurts. We can feel the distance in our souls. It’s as if our personhood is under assault.

In these times, I am particularly grateful to my wife who has long had a talent for finding things to keep our children occupied. Recently, she purchased a rock tumbler to teach our children about science. The whole process involves four steps

and takes approximately one month. First, you place ordinary rocks and coarse grit into the tumbler. For seven days, you run the machine at its highest speed. When that cycle has ended, you dump the tumbler out and wash the rocks.

The next week, the rocks are mixed with slightly finer grit and placed back into the tumbler on medium speed. At the end of that cycle, the rocks are removed and cleaned once again. The third week, the speed remains the same - still medium - but the grit is finer still. Then, at the end of that seven day cycle, the rocks are cleaned once more. For the fourth and final step, the rocks are joined by the finest polishing grit and the device set on its slowest speed. When the final week has ended, the rocks will be smooth to the touch.

In all, the process takes about 30 days, which is 10 days shorter than the current Christian season. Our new rock tumbler is also a fitting metaphor for Lent. Right now – today - our rough edges are being smoothed away and our lives are being transformed. Sometimes, a dramatic change can refocus our attention and invite us to put things in perspective.

Today, we remember that personal transformation is a lot like healing. It is rarely quick or easy. In our waiting, we long for the day when our scriptures will be

fulfilled. When the healing of all creation will be made known. When there will be peace at the last.

It may now feel as though we are being asked to do the impossible. But, this too shall pass. And with God's help, something new may even be born in us. May it be so and all thanks be to God. Amen.