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# First Word

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## Guest Columnist: John Clinton Jr.

### THE GOD OF THE SLOW LANE

All this social distancing and staying in our homes has revealed just how distracted and comforted we are by all of our busyness. In fact, I believe all the busyness and noise in our culture keeps many of us from considering some of the foundational questions confronting every human life. In other words, there's a case to be made that we are actually entertaining ourselves to death in an attempt to avoid thinking about difficult topics like faith and eternity.



And tragically, if God speaks to the soul in a whisper it had better be quiet around us in order to hear what He is saying. Perhaps, these strange and anxious times have reminded us of the importance of being still. Unfortunately, stillness is not a valued trait in our culture but it is nonetheless critical to the development of Godly wisdom and spiritual maturity.

If you're like me, you have found a time of daily devotions and prayer to be an essential part of your overall well-being. Yet, there's something in my flesh that inevitably pulls me away from this practice, enticing me with something else I find entertaining. If I seek to be a great man of God, like the saints of old, I need to do what they did—prioritize time alone with God and protect it from the distractions around me.

Indeed, God doesn't have an express lane.

## Trusting God in Uncertain Times BY JOEL SUTTON

You have heard it said, "We live in uncertain times." As we encounter this pandemic of the corona virus, we all face uncertainty.

You face uncertain times, not only because of the Covid-19 virus, but maybe because of your job, or your finances, or your children and grandchildren. And while you cannot avoid uncertainty in this life, you can respond to it in a Christ-honoring way.

A while back, I read about profound interchange the renowned Jesuit philosopher John Kavanaugh had with Mother Teresa. He had traveled to Calcutta to work for a month at "her House of the Dying". This experience was part of his heartfelt search for direction about his future. He was not sure if he should return to America to become a university professor or if he should remain abroad and work with the poor.

So he asked Mother Teresa to pray for him. "What do you want me to pray for?" she asked. He

responded, "Pray that I have clarity."

She said firmly, "No, I will not do that." When asked why, she said, "Clarity is the last thing you are clinging to and must let go of." Kavanaugh commented that she always seemed to have the clarity he longed for. Mother Teresa laughed and said, "I have never had clarity; what I have always had is trust. So I will pray that you trust God."

Psalm 62:7-8 says, "My salvation and my honor depend upon God; He is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him for God is our refuge."

In the great faith Hall-of-Fame chapter in Hebrews 11, we are reminded that trust is strongest when we lack clarity, when can't see what is ahead. Noah built an ark while waiting for 120 years for a never-seen-before rainfall. Sarah was told to trust God for a child in her old age with no idea

as to how such a thing could happen. Abraham went out, "not knowing where he was going", and later planned to sacrifice his own son with no understanding as to why or what might occur. The truth in each of these stories is unmistakable. Faith flourishes when we are trusting God more than our need for clarity.

Do you feel you are in a fog today? Does the present moment feel shaky and the future unclear? Remember, He is God and He your mighty rock. He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek HIM—even when we cannot not see what lies ahead. He has not changed. You can trust Him today, even though His way seems ambiguous.

Friends, as you go through these uncertain days ahead—realize that you have been given a real gift, the gift of faith. Faith, not certainty, is the single most important ingredient to a life pleasing to God.

OUR MISSION:  
TO HELP  
INDIVIDUALS  
BECOME  
CHRIST-CENTERED  
& CHRIST-SENT  
TOGETHER

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## Looking Ahead at First Free!

As we put April's First Word together, we wanted you to know what our plans are over the upcoming weeks. We will continue to monitor both the CDC and the Minnesota Department of Health's guidelines for churches and public gatherings. We want to do our part to align with those recommendations. We do so not out of fear, but because we love our church family and our community and want to do our part to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Here is what you need to know:

### Our church isn't closed. Our church is deployed.

- Although all First Free gatherings, including Sunday worship services are currently canceled, every Sunday we will post our worship service online. These videos will be found on our website ([www.firstfreechurch.org](http://www.firstfreechurch.org)), our YouTube channel, and on Facebook.
- Every Wednesday a member of our staff will post a short devotional video on our church website, Facebook page and Instagram.
- We will be providing daily encouragement—Bible verses, encouraging thoughts and prayers—through posts on social media (Facebook and Instagram).
- Finally, we are encouraging our groups to find ways to connect with each other throughout the week via email, Facebook, phone calls, Zoom meetings, etc.

**We are asking everyone to continue to pray** for each other and for the ministry of the church. You can submit prayer requests online on our webpage ([www.firstfreechurch.org](http://www.firstfreechurch.org)) or by calling the church office. We will continue to send those requests out through our weekly Wednesday Prayer Guide. If you'd like to be added to the prayer guide email list, contact the church office.

We also want to provide an opportunity for those who are able, to give specifically to those in our church family that will need help during this crisis. You can give specifically to our benevolent fund (<https://firstfreempls.churchcenter.com/giving/to/benevolent>). Those within the church family who would like to request help should contact the church office.

This is obviously new territory for all of us; but like all changes and challenges, this also provides us with an opportunity for growth as we learn to trust God in new ways. Our hope is that in this time we will learn how to better depend upon God, how to better care for one another, and how to worship when the future is uncertain. God is still God and he is still good.

## Thank you Paulette!

First Free has been privileged to have Paulette Goodman, along with her faithful partner, Bob Goodman, serving at the helm of the Kitchen Ministry for many years. This spring, Paulette is hanging up her church apron as she retires from her real job at Lakeville North High School. We wish her well as she enters into a new phase of life outside of the kitchen.

We'd like to express a VERY BIG THANK YOU to Paulette for the endless hours of service that she has given to First Free and the Kitchen Ministry. She has provided thousands of donuts, hundreds of gallons of coffee and juice for Sunday morning Fellowship Times along with being a dessert and catering extraordinaire for many special events at First Free, including Terrace on Chicago, VBC, Women's Brunches and wedding receptions. She has served humbly and gracefully with a smile on her face and a heart full of hospitality.

### We asked Paulette a few questions that she's answered below:

#### **How long have you served in First Free's kitchen?**

I have been serving in the kitchen coordinator position for, I think, over 20 years! It was a shared position for a lot of that time. Time flies when you're having fun, I guess, or when you feel comfortable using the gifts God has given you.

#### **You have baked a lot for First Free over the years. What's your favorite dish or dessert you ever made for a church event?**

I think one of my favorite desserts was a Tiramisu Layer Cake, made for one of the earliest Terrace on Chicago events.

#### **What has been a highlight of serving in the kitchen?**

There have been a lot of great moments over the years. I have really enjoyed seeing God at work during fellowship time each Sunday. I am old enough to remember when we shuffled from Sunday school to church and had little time for interacting with each other. It has been good to see the bulk of the congregation, all generations mixing, getting to know each other and giving real support where needed. I have also witnessed or heard of members intentionally using this time to welcome and connect visitors with individuals and community groups.

#### **Have you seen God work through the service of the kitchen & fellowship time?**

I have always felt privileged, and tried hard to make the kitchen a place to be used by many individuals and groups, each of them using the kitchen as a tool to further the mission statement of the church within their event or program. Surely God has been at work in and around the kitchen, as it is used by so many,



## Church Family News

Congratulations to Laura & Brian Johnson on the birth of their daughter Ariella Grace Johnson!  
Congratulations to Ann & Rob Mlenek on the birth of their son Orion Bastian Mlenek!  
Congratulations to Gretchen & Sam Ekstrom on the birth of their daughter Isla Gray Ekstrom!