

Questions so far

- 3/12/20 Practicing social distancing (where you voluntarily choose to stay out of group settings) does not necessarily mean emotional distancing. A lot of us are reeling from the effects of this virus on our daily routines, and one of those effects is (and will be) being primarily at home, and for many people, alone. Now is a great time to reach out to others. One way is to engage actively in social media, (rather than just scrolling, which can fuel the sense of isolation, and in crisis: panic) so one thing I'll be doing is posting a question every day to facebook in hopes of fostering community and active engagement, but I also encourage everyone to check in more directly with friends and family as well. It's a good time to call or text friends and family. My question for today is: whose example and leadership have you been impressed by and grateful for as they responded to this crisis, and why?
- 3/13/20 Hi, friends! My question for today is: what are your favorite means to long distance quality time? Or what's someone done for you long distance which really made you feel connected to that person?
- 3/14/20 Today's question: when you're stressed, what helps you feel calm?
- 3/15/20 My question for today is in all of this upheaval: who's been on your heart? Who are you concerned for? (Either specifically or collectively?) How can we be a help?
- Additional question for anyone feeling the lack of gathering with a church community this morning: Any prayers, passages of scripture, messages, liturgies, music, coloring pages, activities, etc... you'd like to share?
- 3/16/20 Since we're starting a new week in this weird new normal: what are some personal goals or hopes you have for this time? Is there a routine you're attempting to structure?
- 3/17/20 Things have been really intense, and I have been valuing laughter so much in its weird sudden moments. What makes you laugh? (Feel free to share links, but maybe give a warning if it's particularly dark humor or something that's not kid friendly, as I imagine a lot of screens owned by adults are being observed by littles these days).
- 3/18/20 What's a struggle for you right now? It's allowed to be something mundane or insignificant compared to the magnitude of the world...
- 3/19/20 Anything you were putting a lot of effort into planning/prepping for which is now... cancelled or become something entirely different? Or still needs to become something different? Feel free to share either big stuff or little stuff.

- 3/20/20 Today's question is about celebrations. Many, although not all celebrations are centered on coming together in person. For today, I'm thinking about joyful celebrations: the birthday parties, giant accomplishments, graduations, etc. which are getting cancelled. What are some ways you like to celebrate in solitude? What are some ways that you've celebrated at a distance in the past? Or ways you love celebrating at home (without needing to buy special supplies?)
- 3/21/20 Do you have beloved small businesses/organizations you're worried for at this time? Share their links on your own page and/or here-- even if not everyone can purchase from them right now, giving them your attention and encouragement can be a help.
- 3/22/20 One of the things I've missed this week is all the little interactions I would be having-- with students, with colleagues, neighbors, friends, check out clerks, etc. Anyone want to share a little story from this week? Something you're learning? A small relief? An unexpected pleasure?
- 3/23/20 It is a new work week. What encouragement are you wanting? Where can you be giving that same encouragement?
- 3/24/20 What are some feelings you've been feeling in all this? It's good to give them a name.
- 3/25/20 So one of the first questions I asked was "when you're stressed, what helps you feel calm?" and I thought, it having been a bit since then, I'd ask: what has been helping you recently?
- 3/26/20 Good morning friends. Today I'm curious about how things have been with you and food during this weird time. Have you made anything particularly delicious? Have there been foods you normally count on that you haven't been able to get? Have you changed the way you get groceries? Are there restaurants you've been ordering from to try and help keep them in business?
- 3/27/20 I've been thinking a lot about the ways in which the deck of life has been stacked in my favor these past few weeks. Where I have privileges without which other people are suffering. I have been extremely upset by the stories of racism I'm seeing regularly, particularly against anyone imagined to be from China, and I worry about how easy it is for me to just be ignorant of these issues because I'm white and this hatred/suspicion/anger isn't directed at me. I'm wanting to pay attention. To bear witness. To oppose racism wherever I find it, including in myself. So I guess my questions for today are: in what ways are you feeling really lucky right now? And on whose behalf are you frustrated/indignant? (You're allowed to be frustrated on your own behalf.)

- 3/28/20 Today's question is an invitation. Would you like to join a tiny care package exchange? The idea is that everything you'd include would be stuff you already have or can make with stuff you already have lying around. No worries if this sounds like too much. And if you love this idea and want to send dozens to all your friends and neighbors, that's also fine, but by signing up you'd be agreeing to send and receive one envelope. :) Sign up by March 31, and put your envelope in the mail by April 5th.
- 3/29/20 What is giving you courage?
- 3/30/20 Anyone feeling like the way we experience time is getting very strange? Are there ways you're marking the days, giving shape to the week?
- 3/31/20 Okay, so I've been talking a lot about mental health here. Yesterday I saw this video, and loved the advice it passed along, so I thought I'd share it. Today's question is, what mental health advice have you been benefiting from? Or are there changes you're wanting to make for your mental wellbeing?
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4gVWzbuytk&fbclid=IwAR0pge79-5HStgO-XYq3kEy1fw2DAAsJRn0ITnp43TGMcbHdPK4VEh1v-TY>
- 4/1/20 I've been noticing a lot of people posting poetry, music, photography, and such lately. Where do you go online to find beauty? What's been striking you as beautiful lately in your life (online or off?)
- 4/2/20 So, mostly I have not felt particularly creative or go-getting at this time. But in some ways, yes. How have you found yourself needing to be creative either artistically or needing to figure out an inventive/unusual solution to a new problem you're facing?
- 4/3/20 Anyone feeling some simultaneous love and hate for "technology" right now? Anyone want to talk about that?
- 4/4/20 I imagine many of us are spending a lot more time in our homes than we usually do. Are there things you find you like more now than you did before you were around so much to appreciate it? Or ways you're using your space that are different?
- 4/5/20 I've been thinking a lot about separation and death. Death is often thought of as separation-- of life from the body, and I want to recognize that many people are already mourning death in this crisis. But I'm also thinking about mourning and separation more broadly. Are there things you're grieving, things you're mourning for today?
- 4/6/20 In his "State of the State" address last night, Gov. Waltz used the analogy of a Minnesota winter to our present situation. He used it really beautifully, so I'm including the speech below, in case anyone wants to read it. I've been thinking about the analogies we're using for crisis, or for our new home lives. The nationwide efforts (switching over factories, the language of "front lines") makes the comparison to war. I've also heard a lot of homesteading analogies (as people are baking their own bread, starting their own gardens, trying to limit their dependence on supply chains). Other analogies I've heard of are

spaceships or sea voyages-- as many of us are confined to a space with a specific crew, no one in, no one out. I know friends living alone fighting against the analogy of solitary confinement. What are some metaphors you've heard or been thinking about as you process your situation? Any favorites? Or ones you can't get out of your head?

- 4/7/20 People seeing my posts are from all over, so for some of you this is massively old news, but anyone want to share signs of spring? We had a massive thunderstorm here last night. It was so loud, I thought someone was trying to steal the dumpsters outside our apartment. Then I saw the flashes of light.
- 4/8/20 Things are legitimately bad right now. In a lot of ways, and for many people much more so than for myself. But I've also felt really aware of and grateful for the things which have been unexpected reliefs or pleasures. What has been good in your life? What are you grateful for?
- 4/9/20 Traditionally, for Christians, this is the day in Holy Week when we remember the last meal Jesus shared with his disciples. In particular, rather than having a servant doing the foot washing before the meal, Jesus washes everyone's feet himself. He makes an example of humility, and not seeing one's position of leadership to be an opportunity to avoid responsibility or push undesirable jobs on others but to serve, and serve in the least appreciated or glamorous ways. Many times in services, churches will reenact this scenario (particularly in situations of reconciliation), washing each other's feet, as a symbol of how we want to live our whole lives.

I'm wondering today, (whatever your beliefs) if there are ways you're seeing people "wash each other's feet"? Where you're seeing leadership in unexpected places? And (without glamorizing those forced to work in high risk conditions without adequate protection or compensation) where are you seeing examples of people serving? How can we wash each others' feet today?

- 4/10/20 Anyone reading anything especially good these days? Things which feel especially appropriate? Books that are good for an escape or catharsis? Things that feel grounding? The book your kids have you read every night and you've grown to love?
- 4/11/20 I reread T. S. Eliot's The Four Quartets this morning, and I've been thinking about stillness. There are many ways in which people are stilled right now, at least our regular activities, our habits, our movements outside of our houses, but this doesn't necessarily translate into any sort of mental or emotional peace. Often the opposite. Feeling cooped up or antsy, exhausted, but not sleeping well. Constantly in motion doing the thousand tasks of our new lives, looking at the news or memes or pictures a friend posted or videos. Is this just me? Where are you finding stillness? Where are you missing it?
- 4/12/20 I've been thinking a lot about the ways in which celebrations can be a weird mix of emotions these days. We live in an apartment complex for student families, and the community has been really good about following rules about families not getting together with each other, and properly socially distancing, even though usually they would see each other all the time. This week we heard our upstairs neighbors get a knock on their door, and

a neighbor family (apparently?) all stand in the hallway over six feet from the door and sing happy birthday to one of the kids. Owen and I (in our apartment downstairs) both burst into tears. Because it was really happy. And really sad. At the same time. I'm feeling this way about Easter too. Yesterday I was telling a friend that it's not so much that I want to celebrate, it's that I want *to want* to celebrate. Anyone have feelings about celebrations they want to share? Unexpected pleasures? Things they're missing?

- 4/13/20 Hello Friends, as of Saturday, I've been posting a question every day for the month Owen and I have been in social distancing. My hope has been that it would foster community and emotional connection over a medium which can so often degrade into flamewars and despair, and it seems like for many people it's been a success. I also think that people have started to find other ways of connecting with each other. So I'm going to commit to posting just on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and perhaps more often if I feel so inclined. (If you ever want to scroll through old questions, I've been tagging these as [#socialnotemotionaldistancing](#).) But what I wanted to ask today is: what are the ways you've felt connected to people in this time? Where have you felt the love of others despite the physical isolation? Or connection to people outside your household for those sheltering with housemates or family?
- 4/15/20 I love handwritten letters. When I was in high school I gave a persuasive speech about why handwritten letters are wonderful, and people (even my fellow teenagers who were very connected digitally) would be happier if they sent and received mail. I was apparently convincing enough that [Mary Stewart](#) sent me a letter the next week. She also sent me one this past month. 😊 These days, with contact so limited between human beings, there's something incredible about packages arriving at the door, and letters or postcards in the mailbox. So I guess my question for today is, do you ever send mail? Have you ever received mail that meant a lot to you?
- 4/17/20 Hey friends, I've been thinking about opposites. I tend to rebel against hard definitions of opposites, as there are often so many more options than just two. I always say I fail the Myers Briggs test because I end up between 45-55% on like three out of four of the categories-- always finding myself going, "what do you mean, 'thinking OR feeling' ????" The two don't need to be enemies, they can be friends. You don't need to ally yourself with just one? But I find this in other ways too. Are there ideas/concepts/objects that you hear talked about in opposition or as mutually exclusive which you think need a little more attention to the grey areas in the middle?
- 4/20/20 Hello friends! We're all being told that physical activity is important for our health, but it can also be hard if you're not able to leave your living space safely, or your usual routine involves things (a pool, a climbing gym, playground) which are no longer options. Have you found ways to keep active? What have you been missing?
- 4/22/20 Hello friends, we're almost to the end of April, which is poetry month, and I have read basically no poetry. What poems/poets/collections of poetry do you love? Any poetry speaking particularly strongly to you at this time?

- 4/24/20 Hello Friends, I've been seeing a bunch of people post a bingo card where they share what they've been sharing their reactions to this situation. And a whole bunch of people have not circled the "cried" square, and this surprised me because I've always been a crier, and I think I've cried daily this month, and I forget that this isn't how everyone reacts. Do you cry much in general? These days? Does it make you uncomfortable when other people cry?
- 4/27/20 Hello Friends, for me, this is the last full week of classes in this strange time which has been the Spring 2020 semester. I'm pretty excited about wrapping up this semester, although it will almost certainly be a very scraggly end of the semester. Any dates or deadlines coming up for any of you that are making time feel real? Things you're looking forward to?
- 4/29/20 Hello friends. This week everything is a struggle. Anyone want to share a thing that seems like it shouldn't be hard, and yet, is so hard for you right now?
- 5/1/20 Hello friends. I've been reading about habit formation and dopamine (happy brain chemicals), and apparently part of the way in which we form habits is through anticipation of good results. The dopamine gets released not just with pleasure but with the anticipation of pleasure (helping to cue a habit) and that makes me think with the future seeming so uncertain, and so many plans people looking forward to being cancelled, it's no wonder people are feeling beaten down and unmotivated. Right now I'm looking forward to the end of the semester, wrapping up this course I'm teaching and wishing my students well. Facebook memories is suggesting that in previous years this process was helped by music. What music is helping you right now?
- 5/4/20 Hello, Friends. It's the last day of classes for the UMN, and as the final discussion post, I'm asking my students (all of whom are first years) to think back about the year, and think about their own experiences. The end of semester questions I like to ask have them think about what they're proud of in their own work, how the habits they are building are shaping who they are as students (and as people), and where they're hoping to grow in the future. Obviously these questions are made more complex by the present situation, but I think they're still worth asking. And I think they're worth asking here, too. Many of you are not in an academic context at this moment, but I'd still love to hear your answers if you'd like to share them. What have you been learning about yourself from this extraordinary context? What has been a hard thing that you've done? Where have you learned you still have a lot of growing to do?
- 5/6/20 Hi friends. One of the things encouraging me enormously in the last few weeks especially is MN suddenly, exuberantly bursting into Spring. I have two questions for today: one is are there plants/growing things you've become extremely fond of in this time of distancing? (Feel free to share photos if you like!) And secondly, [Owen](#) and I have a little garden plot this summer: I know a lot of you garden extensively, and I know many of you have worked with raised beds. What advice do you have for people seeking low effort engagement, but still having something we can be happy about?

- 5/8/20 Hello friends, today I'm wondering where online you've found real community. Individual connection (just one on one or even household to household) is also great, but right now I'm curious about community, where an online group feels like a real group with an identity and such. Doesn't need to be since the pandemic, although it certainly can be.

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Future Questions?