

Greetings and grace and peace to you this mid-week evening. So wonderful to have a few minutes with you – whether you are watching live or watching when you have a moment – I am thrilled to be able to spend a few minutes with you during the time of distancing. Hopefully, this will help you – if only for a few minutes – feel connected to church and to God.

I was doing some reading Sunday afternoon and came across a story that just seemed perfect for this time. In this day-and-age there are so many ways and social media options for us to get answers to whatever questions we may have – oh and get them at any time and any place. We all have heard “hey Siri.... What does.....? or Alexa can you tell me .....? Or Google..... how do I get to.....? We have so many opportunities for all kinds of answers whenever we ask, but for some of us older folks, it wasn’t always that way.

Let’s listen to a story written by Paul Villiard called Information Please

*When I was quite young, my father had one of the first telephones in our neighborhood. I remember well the polished old case fastened to the wall. The shiny receiver hung on the side of the box. I was too little to reach the telephone, but used to listen with fascination when my mother used to talk to it.*

*Then I discovered that somewhere inside the wonderful device lived an amazing person – her name was Information Please and there was nothing she did not know. Information Please could supply anybody’s number and the correct time.*

*My first personal experience with this genie-in-the-bottle came one day while my mother was visiting a neighbor. Amusing myself at the tool bench in the basement, I whacked my finger with a hammer. The pain was terrible, but there didn’t seem to be any reason in crying because there was no one home to give sympathy. I walked around the house sucking my throbbing finger, finally arriving at the stairway – The telephone! Quickly I ran for the footstool in the parlor and dragged it to the landing. Climbing up I unhooked the receiver in the parlor and held it to my ear. Information Please I said into the mouthpiece just above my head.*

*A click or two and a small clear voice spoke into my ear. “Information.”  
“I hurt my finger. . .” I wailed into the phone. The tears came readily enough now that I had an audience.*

*“Isn’t your mother home?” came the question.*

*“Nobody’s home but me.” I blubbered.*

*"Are you bleeding?"*

*"No," I replied. "I hit my finger with the hammer and it hurts."*

*"Can you open your icebox?" she asked. I said I could. "Then chip off a little piece of ice and hold it to your finger."*

*After that I called Information Please for everything. I asked her for help with my geography and she told me where Philadelphia was. She helped me with my math, and she told me my pet chipmunk I had caught in the park just the day before would eat fruits and nuts.*

*And there was the time that Petey, our pet canary died. I called Information Please and told her the sad story. She listened, then said the usual things grown-ups say to soothe a child. But I wasn't consoled. Why is it that birds should sing so beautifully and bring joy to all families, only to end up as a heap of feathers, feet up on the bottom of a cage?*

*She must have sensed my deep concern, for she said quietly, "Paul, always remember that there are other worlds to sing in."*

*Somehow I felt better.*

*Another day I was on the telephone. "Information Please."*

*"Information," said the now familiar voice.*

*"How do you spell fix?" I asked.*

*At that instant my sister, who took unholy joy in scaring me, jumped off the stairs at me with a banshee shriek – Yaaaaaa! I fell off the stool, pulling the receiver out of the box by its roots. We were both terrified – information please was no longer there, and I was not at all sure that I hadn't hurt her on the other end when I pulled the receiver out.*

*Minutes later there was a man on the porch "I'm a telephone repair man. I was working down the street and the operator said there might be some trouble at this number." He reached for the receiver in my hand. "What happened?"*

*I told him.*

*"Well, we can fix that in a minute or two." He opened the telephone box, exposing a maze of wires and coils, and fiddled for a while with the end of the receiver cord, tightening things with a small screwdriver. He jiggled the hook up and down a few times, then spoke into the phone. "Hi, this is Pete. Everything's under control at 105. The kid's sister scared him and he pulled the cord out of the box."*

*He hung up, smiled, gave me a pat on the head and walked out the door.*

*All this took place in a small town in the Pacific Northwest. Then when I was 9 years old, we moved across the country to Boston. I missed my friend very much.*

*Information Please* belonged in that old wooden box back home, and I somehow never thought of trying the tall, shiny new phone that sat on the hall table.

Yet as I grew into my teens, the memories of those childhood conversations never really left me; often in moments of doubt and perplexity I would recall the serene sense of security I had then. I appreciated now how patient, understanding, and kind she was to have spent her time on a little boy.

A few years later, on my way west to college, my plane put down in Seattle. I had about half an hour or so between plane, and I spent 15 minutes or so on the phone with my sister, who lived there now. Then without thinking what I was doing, I dialed my hometown operator and said, "Information Please".

Miraculously, I heard again the small, clear voice I knew so well, "Information."

I hadn't planned this but I heard myself saying, "Could you tell me please how-to spell fix?"

There was a long pause. Then came the soft spoken answer, "I guess that your finger must have healed by now."

I laughed, "So it's really still you, I said. "I wonder if you have any idea how much you meant to me during that time."

"I wonder, she said, if you know how much your calls meant to me. I never had any children, and I used to look forward to your calls. Silly wasn't it?"

It didn't seem silly, but I didn't tell her that. Instead I told her how often I had thought of her over the years and I asked if I could call her again when I came back to visit my sister.

"Please do, just ask for Sally."

"Good-bye Sally." It sounded strange for Information Please to have a name. "If I run into any chipmunks, I'll tell them to eat fruit and nuts."

"Do that" she said "Well, good-bye."

Just three months later I was back in Seattle. . .A different voice answered Information and I asked for Sally.

"Are you a friend?"

"Yes, a very old friend."

"Then I'm sorry to have to tell you. Sally has been working part-time the last few years because she was sick. She died five weeks ago."

But before I could hang up she said, "Wait a minute. Did you say your name was Paul?"

"Yes."

*“Well, Sally left a message for you. She wrote it down, Here it is I’ll read it ‘Tell him I still say there are other worlds to sing in. He’ll know what I mean’.”  
I thanked her and hung up. I did know what Sally meant.*

“There are other worlds to sing in” - Wow – what an amazing and beautiful story and beautiful thought.

Right now, as we continue to stay apart and find ourselves not in community but rather in isolation, we can’t help but crave and need to feel a sense of belonging. Especially in this current world where the feeling of disconnection from others is commonplace and displacement is a huge problem. Modern technology and electronic connections of course have helped some to stay connected however they can also make things worse at times. There isn’t a chance or anything easy about ignoring or disregarding what’s going on in this world.

To establish a permanent sense of belonging, we have to look beyond people and places. What we discover through Jesus is that belonging is about so much more than a relationship with something, it's about a relationship with someone. And what's so inspiring about belonging to Jesus is that we don't need to fit a certain mold or do a certain thing to belong. He welcomes us no matter who we are, where we're from and what we've done.

And just to help you feel that belonging – let’s look to the authority – the Word of God.

**Psalms 100:3** - Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

**John 10:27-28** - My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.

**Romans 14:8** - If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

**2 Corinthians 1:21-22** - Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

**1 John 3:1** - See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

**1 John 4:4** - You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

So what world will you sing in? Will it be a world of needing Information Please? We can look to anyone for answers and we can look to the One who has all the answers. We can also all be a Sally – someone who goes the extra mile to help and be a comfort to others when they need that connection. We can love our neighbors and be a servant in the work that God has asked us to do. But we can't do it alone – we can't rely simply on our sinful selves to get everything done. We need to look to God and let God lead us into a world of connection, of love and of community.

We aren't going to be socially distanced forever – yes, our lives will be different from this point on – but it will continue to be a world where we live in relation to others and in community. How we choose to live in that world should be done in a way that finds us in relationships with other and most of all in relationship with our God.

Let's us pray:

Thank you, God, for the body of believers who are called to serve you and others. Thank you for all who are proclaiming the Good News to all who will hear. Send us all out to be a light in the dark. Send us out to speak life and be the "information please" to help others to see where the answers can be found. Send us out to extend grace and mercy. Send us out to feed the hungry, to befriend the lonely, to find the lost. Open the doors of the Church and fill it with the broken, the angry, the hurting. Let them find forgiveness and comfort here in the presence of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Announcements:

Kids URmy Sunshine – please submit by Saturday