

Hello Everyone! My name is Alice Post, and I am the Program Coordinator for the St. Andrew's Side by Side program. I hope that each of you are healthy and that you are doing well. Thank you for joining me for this time together online.

This week I have been thinking about the fact that when we talk about "these times" it's not only this radically strange time of living in the midst of a global pandemic. We are also still in the season of Lent.... a season in the church when we remember that Jesus himself withdrew into a time of isolation. He withdrew to Gethsemane to fast and to pray. But he wasn't completely alone.

In Matthew 26, verses 36 through 38, we read:

³⁶ Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." ³⁷ He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. ³⁸ Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me."

It seems to me that in this passage Jesus actually gave us a model for a ministry of presence, even while social distancing. He brought three disciples with him, but asked them to just be nearby, to stay awake, and to pray. They were to remain attentive, standing by and praying alongside. But it's not easy.

Without interacting directly, even that small distance made it difficult to maintain an attentive presence. Thinking about how difficult it would be to stay awake, I wonder if they tried looking toward Jesus; keeping their eyes facing toward where Jesus was praying.

That brings to mind a song that is often known by the first line of its chorus "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus." Written by Helen Lemmel, it was inspired by a pamphlet written by missionary Lillias Trotter.

The version of this song that we will listen to concentrates on the song's chorus, and is performed by "Salt of the Sound." This recording begins with an instrumental section, so I would invite you to relax with a deep breath, open your heart and mind, and take those moments to pray. You might lift up some of your concerns or ask God to speak to your heart as you listen to the words of the song.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dFfLt2Bd3o>

In these unprecedented times, there is much to claim our attention and distract us. It's tempting to withdraw into ourselves in the face of all the barriers there are to connecting, but there are still ways that we can be "nearby" and "wakeful." And we can PRAY.

In the coming days, lets "Turn [our] eyes upon Jesus," listening for God's voice, and being guided by the Holy Spirit to carry out God's work in the world. A world that needs God's love more than ever.

A final word from scripture. Here is an excerpt from Hebrews 12, verses 1 and 2.

"...let's run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith..."

Be well, and take care of one another. God Bless!