

FINLANDIA

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March 19, 2020

How long, O Lord? -Psalm 13

Dear Finlandia Community,

I'm writing this to you on the first day of Spring, or so my Google calendar tells me. Today the sky is gray, the air heavy, the snow brown and soggy – an external reality which mirrors the internal for many of us, whose daily rhythms and future plans have been interrupted by the Coronavirus. Wherever you are, whether in Hancock or far away to home – first, know that my prayers for your wellbeing and that of your family are daily and sincere.

And second, I want to acknowledge that the collective situation we are facing is new and it is hard.

Most of us have never experienced anything like this before. Almost overnight, our communal life was put on hold. Though many enjoy quality time alone, even the extreme introvert has a spirit wired for connection and community. To be socially isolated from one another goes against a deep human need. So, **this is new**, for almost all of us, and though we are physically apart, we are in this together. That said, I wonder what it would look like to operate on the presumption of grace –that others are doing the best they can right now...and you are too. Is it possible to be gentle with one another, and also honest at the same time?

In the Biblical witness, there is a tradition of lament. The words atop this letter are from Psalm 13, wherein someone was crying out to God in a time of distress. And the first thing they wanted to know? Was *how long* the suffering was going to last. If you've ever been in the doctor's office with a diagnosis pending, or had a team of specialists standing around your bed holding *your* chart with puzzled looks, you know that it's the not-knowing that can be the hardest. And right now? We don't know so much: school, jobs, livelihoods are pending, and as is illustrated by the bare shelves at stores across the country – pending can too easily turn to panic. **This is hard.**

When we hurt physically, we cry out in pain; when we hurt spiritually, we can lament. With our senior students, I lament the loss of a capstone spring semester and with our ball players the loss of a season. For our campus, I lament the loss of in-person community – bubbling up at Finn Hall, in the classroom, on the broom ball ice, or shared meals in the chapel. And with our world, I lament the pain, the unexpected hardship, and the loss of life this pandemic will leave in its wake before this is through.

And yet – though the day is gray, and this is new and this is hard—yet, **there is reason to hope**. In Wuhan they can hear the birds again. In Italy, they are singing across the

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alleyways. In homes around the country – kids are being gifted with more face time with parents than, perhaps, ever in their young lives. The thing about lament psalms? They cry out in pain, sometimes verse after verse, and yet each one of them – almost without fault, ends with at least one line of trust. At least one line. It might not be an entire hymn, or chapter – but at least one line, that says, I trust you, God, to be about *sustaining grace*.

I trust that God is with us, most succinctly, in the most difficult times – because that is what the cross of Christ, and life, has shown me.

I trust that the human spirit can burn even brighter and more beautifully under extreme situations – because that is what history, and my own friends and family, have demonstrated.

I know that this season we find ourselves in is new and it is hard, but I trust that this too shall pass, and we'll get through it together.

Because today is the first day of Spring, and summer will come.

Blessings and care, from the Chapel of Saint Matthew -

Pastor Sarah

For Support:

For emotional, spiritual, or social support during this time of physical isolation, look for these resources coming from Finlandia and the office of Campus Pastor:

1. Sunday Stories – to inspire, offer healthy practices, and connect with your Finlandia community – you can look for these each Sunday evening via email.
2. Instagram – For a daily meditation, prayer, or uplift – follow **#FinnU_Faithlife** on Instagram.
3. Zoom-Check-ins: Need a listening ear? Pr. Sarah is available for individual Zoom sessions, to support you, ask questions, and offer prayer as needed. Email her directly to sign up (sarah.semmlersmith@finlandia.edu) or through the link provided in Sunday Stories.

Rev. Sarah Semmler Smith
Campus Pastor