This COVID-19 pandemic has forced us into difficult decisions and actions which have removed from our lives and living the notion of normality. So some of us wrestle with the difficult task of self- or state-imposed quarantine. These are not normal times.

Many of us long for normality to return, for access to our sources of comfort, entertainment, social interaction and inspiration. All of us long for the day when this COVID-19 pandemic will breathe its last.

If there is one truth I am convinced about, it is this: one of, if not the most difficult task or activity in life, is to continue. To continue, despite the prevailing circumstances.

Thing about it, is it not difficult to continue to hope when all the evidence around us suggest despair; to continue in the face of a negative diagnosis; to continue to believe in the potential of another when they no longer believe in themselves?

Is it not difficult to continue to love another person in the face of anger, abuse, neglect, abandonment, spite or hate; to continue to commit to a relationship when the other partner shows no similarity commitment; to be passionate when the other’s default is vengeance?

Is it not difficult to continue when you join the growing list of those who are unemployed or furloughed; to continue when your business goes under; to continue when you can’t pay your bills or don’t know where you or your family’s next meal is coming from; to continue when you are not eligible for financial assistance from the state?

Simply put, in the challenging circumstances of life and living, it is almost always difficult to continue! Often the far more compelling option is to give up or to give in.

I know, as you do, that often we have little choice but to continue. We humans adapt; that is our default. I also know, as you do, that while life sometimes pauses, it continues with or without us.

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THE CALL TO CONTINUE

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However, when we transition from being passengers in life to being determiners of what we do, indeed when we choose to continue, two things are true. Firstly, to choose to continue is fundamentally to be hopeful, and secondly, to choose to continue requires us to be faithful to a particular path or direction.

What are you choosing to continue to do, or believe in, at this time, that is hopeful and requires your faithfulness?

My simple message to you based on 1 Peter is that in the midst of our lives and living, and more so, in these abnormal times, God’s call to us which requires a faithful response, is the Call to Continue.

First Peter, a General Epistle, was written to a group of churches in Asia Minor at a time when the Christians were suffering slander and persecution from a larger unbelieving community. Targeting primarily the most vulnerable within the community, this message was one of encouragement for the Christians to hold fast to the promise of God’s blessings, while remembering and acting out their calling to act appropriately to those hostile to the faith.

It was a call to continue! Hold fast, don’t give up or give in, continue on!

There are three expressions of this Call to Continue:

1. Continue To Do your Duty
   Do your duty in the faith despite the consequences. Engage the difficult tasks you have and embrace the suffering that will come your way as a result. Five duties are located in this text between verses 13-18: Be eager to do what is good. Be bold. Be hopeful. Be trustworthy. Be rejoicing. Note the promise – even if you should suffer for doing what is right/duty you are blessed! To be blessed means God has recognized us, God identifies with us, God empowers us to transform our reality.

2. Continue to be Defiant
3. Continue to be Distinctive (vs. 21)
   Our calling in the face of doubt and fear and discord, in the face of accusation, charge, slander, evil, moral liberalism, ethical temptation, human and physical weakness, illness, disappointment and despair, is to continue to keep the faith!!! Why? Because of who you are and whose you are. You are God’s distinctive people!

   So we continue: To worship in spite of; to pray and praise in spite of; to study God’s Word – light and lamp - in spite of; to be a witness of God’s saving and transforming grace in spite of; to be persons of integrity in spite of; to pursue high values and morals in spite of; to encourage and support others in spite of; to challenge the systems and structures which lead to brokenness and evil in spite of.

   We will not stop until the earth is filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the seas!

I appeal to you, through the words of 1 Peter 3, to be hopeful and faithful, to continue to do your duty, continue to be defiant, and continue to be distinctive. In simpler terms, continue to do what is right, continue to challenge what is wrong, continue to depend on God in Christ, through the Spirit!”

- Contributed by: Rev. Norbert Stephens, General Secretary, UCJCI

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