

# AColyte

March 2020

A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things  
at Austin College



Yep.

That's about right.

## AColyte

A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things at Austin College

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## TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN...

Planet Earth  
In the Time of the Coronavirus  
Right after Lunch

Well – here we are... wherever this is.

I've got a Coronavirus Playlist working.

I keep getting reminded of particular lines from particular songs.

*It's the World's Gone Crazy Cotillion  
The ladies are dancing alone  
'Cause the sidemen all want to be front men  
And the front men all want to go home.  
--Waylon Jennings*

*Everything is different now.  
--Don Henley*

*This room smells like hotel illness  
The scars I hide are now your business  
I can't seem to make hair nor hide of this  
No baby love is not a punishment  
--The Black Crowes*

*I knew this poet, come hell or high water,  
Wrote a new song a day, every day of the week  
I asked him, "What if they don't come like they ought to?"  
He said, "I lower my standards and get me some sleep."  
--Kevin Welch*

*Keep your distance.  
Keep your distance.  
When I feel you close to me,  
What can I do but fall?  
--Richard Thompson*

It feels like all of the things in those song quotes are true at once.

The world *has* gone crazy.

Everything *is* different now.

Any room could quickly become *Hotel Illness*.

Lots of things don't seem to be *coming like they ought to*. We might need to change our expectations.

And we've all been instructed, in no uncertain terms, to *keep our distance*.

I don't know about you, but I don't like it.

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I had a lot of plans for this Spring – as did all of you.

I wanted to play a CD Release concert with the Tone Deaf Cowboys at Poor David's Pub in Dallas.

I wanted to send ACTivators to lead retreats for elementary school children at Gilmont and Glen Lakes.

I wanted to accompany ACTivators to Houston and Mo-Ranch, and to lead worship services at the Homestead Senior Care Center in Denison.

I wanted to talk about the Parable of the Good Samaritan to members of First Presbyterian Church in Austin ("is it really possible for us to identify with the traveler, the robbers, and the Good Samaritan – all at the same time?").

I wanted to go to Midland and teach Ruling Elders how to write sermons.

I wanted to work with some AC students to host and attend a Passover Seder Dinner in the Sallie Majors Chapel (formerly known as the Small Chapel).

I wanted to attend the Indian Cultural Association Masala Dinner in the newly-renovated Grum Sanctuary in Wynne Chapel. I wanted ICA to be able to use our beautiful pew-free space, our excellent stage, and our amazing new Audio-Visual system in there.

And I wanted to organize and help host a great big party to dedicate those renovated spaces in Wynne Chapel and hear the A Cappella Choir and Chamber Orchestra perform Vivaldi's "Gloria."

But...

None of that is happening.

In fact, it kind of feels like *nothing* is happening.

The Spring semester at Austin College will continue – but not the way we planned;

not the way we all assumed it would be;  
not the way we wanted it to be.

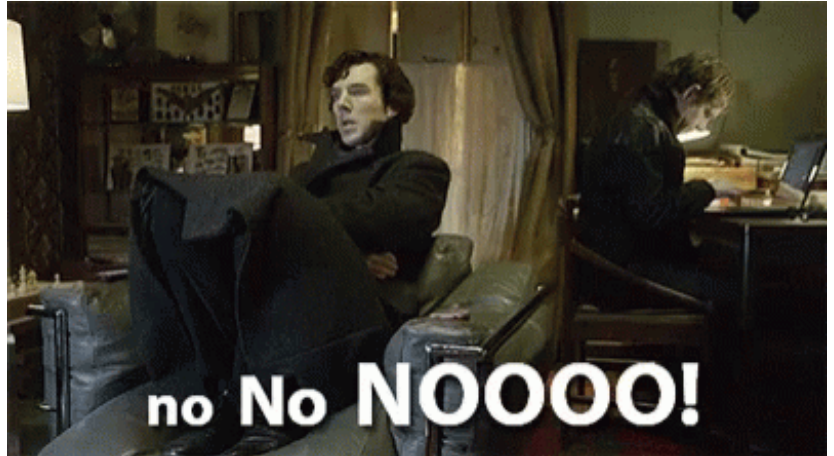
There will be no athletic contests.

There will be no "in-the-round" production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in the Grum Sanctuary (and that would have been *really* cool).

There will be no Kangapalooza this Spring (at least not the way it was planned).

It just stinks. It's disappointing, it's frustrating, and it's irritating.

And I don't feel like I can do anything about any of it.



I feel like my hair's on fire. I want to *do something*.

Actually, I want to do lots of things.

I want to act.

I want to *fix* it.

I want to figure out what we all can do next.

I want everybody on the AC Senior Leadership Team to have a day off and a good night's sleep.

I want to know when this will be over.

I want to reassure my anxious friends – about graduation, about future events on this campus; about the next steps in our lives.

I want to make something happen.

I want closure.

I know the current situation is not normal and I'm ready for things again to be predictable, and steady, and comfortable.

But we're just not there right now.

All we know for sure is what's gone – what's **not** happening.

And that makes me feel like my hair is on fire.

I want things to change. *Soon.*

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When the biblical Book of Habakkuk begins, Habakkuk is acting like his hair's on fire.

O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear?

“Can't you see that everything is going wrong?”

Or cry to thee “Violence!” and thou wilt not save?

Or at least “Disease!”

Why do you make me see wrongs and look upon trouble?

“Why didn't we take this seriously sooner?”

“Why don't we have enough tests?”

“Why do we have to separate ourselves even if we're not vulnerable to the virus?”

“Why don't other people understand how serious this is?”

“Why can't I have the senior year that I've been dreaming of and planning for my whole life?”

Habakkuk's hair is figuratively on fire.

He wants answers. He wants changes. And he wants them soon.

And if we're honest with ourselves I think we can all sympathize.

Like Habakkuk, we can probably look around right now and make a long and accurate list of the ways things are not like they're supposed to be;  
not like we want them to be;  
not like they should be.

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After he finishes his hair-on-fire rant (and it goes on for 17 verses), at the beginning of chapter 2, Habakkuk says

... I will take my stand to watch,  
and station myself on the tower,  
and look forth to see what he will say to me,  
and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

He's anxious.

He's impatient.

He's tense.

*Sometimes I get so tense  
But I can't speed up the time  
--Guns N' Roses*

That's Habakkuk.

He wants to know what's going on. And he wants to know now.

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And the Lord answered me:  
"Write the vision; make it plain upon tablets,  
so he may run who reads it.  
For still the vision awaits its time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie.  
If it seem slow, wait for it;  
it will surely come, it will not delay."

“If it seem slow, wait for it.”

Or, if you prefer the Gospel according to Axl Rose:

*But, you know, love,  
There's one more thing to consider.  
Said, woman, take it slow  
And things will work out fine  
You and I could use a little patience*

There it is.

I don't know about you, but lines like

*You and I could use a little patience*

and

*If it seem slow, wait for it*

seem sort of relevant and even a little bit comforting right about now.

We do need a little patience.

We just need to wait for a lot of things that seem slow.

We know – but we need to be disciplined about remembering – that everybody's doing the best they can.

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But there's more there than just helpful and relevant calls to be patient.

Axl Rose:

*Sometimes I get so tense  
But I can't speed up the time  
But, you know, love,  
There's one more thing to consider.*

The Book of Habakkuk:

“Write the vision;  
make it plain upon tablets,  
so he may run who reads it.

What “one more thing” should we consider?

What “vision” should we be writing?

Check this out:

[https://youtu.be/oCnf\\_DdxhcE](https://youtu.be/oCnf_DdxhcE)

I’ve been thinking a lot about that chorus in the last few days.

*I just want to walk with you*

from at least six feet away...

*As we do the things we know we have to do*

wash our hands,  
practice social distancing,  
figure out remote classes,

*Ever hopeful and ever blue*

confident that we’ll get through this,  
even though it still stinks

*Doing the things we know we have to do*

thinking about the most vulnerable ones among us,  
showing up (digitally),  
keeping our distance,

*And now we all know deep down in our hearts  
That someday this could all fall apart*

But not today.  
This is weird, but it’s not final.



*O, but right now, let's just be heroes.*

--David & David

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Write the vision.

Take a deep breath.

Keep your head in the game.

Do the things you know you have to do.

Watch for instances of extreme kindness and creativity. This is a fertile time for that kind of thing.

Hell, *perpetrate* some instances of extreme kindness and creativity. I know you, #ROONATION – that's your wheelhouse.

Think about what stories you want to be able to tell your grandkids about this time. Live those.

Let's turn this weird and uncomfortable moment into an interesting chapter in an epic story.

Your epic story.

*Our* epic story.

Right now, let's just be heroes.

Until next time (which will probably be soon – what else am I going to do?),

I remain,

Just Another Cowboy Preacher,

Waiting with mixed emotions for the first time I hear a song that rhymes "CoVID-19" and "Quarantine,"

JOHN WILLIAMS

Chaplain