

Good morning,



I am so glad to see the snow melt as the rain washes it away. Let's just pray we don't have damage from atmospheric rivers or creeks like the province did in November. Part of my gladness has to do with being able to get out of the house again and not just for the purpose of shovelling snow. Like you I am thankful to God for a warm, clean, safe place to live, but the pandemic coupled with severe weather can easily lead to "cabin fever." It's that feeling of being cooped up without other options.

During those many years I spent as chaplain for prisoners, I saw the effect of this kind of cabin fever. It is the result of having freedom limited - which is the punishment of incarceration. Those suffering from cabin fever would brood about their fate, they would be angry or surly with little patience. They would push people away and were like trouble looking for a place to happen. As you might expect, cabin fever was not uncommon in that setting with so many barriers that prevented them from doing what they wanted to do. So the rule of thumb in that population was "mind your own business," "do your own time," and "get out of my face." Often colourful profanity was added to make the point. So when there are barriers to freedom and people focus on their frustrations, things go downhill quickly and affect anyone nearby.

Anyone who came over to the chapel would use the excuse that the chaplain always had coffee on. But most of the time they wanted to talk and unload the pressure of their frustrations. So they would talk. I would listen and wonder what I was going to say. I always had some kind of response in those conversations and it was usually about balance. I would invite them to come and sing at our *Monday Night Fellowship* where we sang from the chapel songbook for two solid hours. I would suggest they meet or introduce them to someone who found a way to "keep it together" in prison. I had some fellows who were willing to assist with that and would share their insight into hobbies, positive thinking, or other useful ways to "do time." Sometimes I would suggest that they try out our weekly *Bible Study*, "just check it out as something different to do." Some stayed, some didn't — that was okay. The *Chapel service* was always available to those who were able to put up with ridicule or joking about attending. On Sunday night I had another group which also involved volunteers from various churches, that was called "*The 12 Steps - A Spiritual Journey: for adult children of addictive and dysfunctional family background.*" It ran for 18 Sunday nights and became quite popular. However, it required a commitment to attend and see it through. That was the challenge.

My point in telling these stories is that cabin fever calls for balance which moves us away from our frustrations to some kind of activity or pastime that helps to re-focus life.

It is interesting to me upon reflection, that the pattern at the chapel was in many ways the same as Hope. We have opportunities for talking on Zoom or the phone (*Phoning Tree*), or occasionally in person with distancing. We have *Thursday morning Hymn Sing* at 10:00 a.m., We can always connect with someone who seems to be doing well and learn something new by using our phone directory. The men can also avail themselves of such an opportunity at the *Friday Men's Group* (8:30 -10:00). *Bible study* takes place on Tuesday afternoon each week at 1:30 and that is fun. And of course we have *Sunday morning worship* with both of its features: *Narthex Time* and the *Worship Service*.

St. Paul did time in lock-up. I often pointed the inmates to him. He seemed able to "*keep it together.*" This is what he wrote from his cell in Philippians 4:8 "***Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.***" Good advice. It's better than focussing on snow, rain, omicron, or anxieties....and it helps.

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The *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* (Jan 18-25) takes place next week (<https://www.weekofprayer.ca>). We have sometimes been involved in an ecumenical service in Nanaimo. I'm not yet sure if there is an event locally on Zoom, but it might be fun to take part in something during that week.

Bishop Kathy Martin joined us for worship last Sunday and spoke highly of our congregations (*Shepherd of the Valley* and *Hope*) as we work together in faith with Zoom and let our lights shine. It's like the message Jesus heard at his baptism: *You are God's beloved, and in you God is well pleased.*

On Saturday, as usual, you will receive two consecutive emails from me. One with the *Home Worship Service* and the other with the *Invitation to Zoom* for worship. I look forward to seeing you then.

The Lord is with us.
Pastor Terry