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Back in August 2019, I laid out the year's themes for Kairos and chose "Leaving" as the final issue. For some reason the story of Paul saying goodbye to the Ephesian elders came to mind and this was my choice as the scriptural basis of this issue: "There was much weeping among them all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, grieving especially because of what he had said, that they would not see him again" (Acts 20:37-38, NRSV).

Here in the latter part of the book of Acts, Paul is on a farewell tour of sorts, passing through Asia on his way to Jerusalem where he knows "imprisonment and persecutions are waiting" (Acts 20:23). He makes stops in Philippi, Troas, Assos, Mitylene, Chios, Samos - Paul pushes himself in hopes of getting to Jerusalem by Pentecost - and he speeds past his beloved Ephesus. Still desiring to speak with the Ephesians once more, he sends word for them to meet him in Miletus, which they did, and his discourse to them is found in Acts 20. It is here that Paul says, "And now I know that none of you... will ever see my face again" (v. 25).

Obviously Paul's words brought tears to the eyes of those in attendance, and, as I read this passage and as I think about each of you, it brings tears to my eyes. This passage is incredibly fitting and I hate that, because of the coronavirus, I cannot say with any certainty that I will see any of your faces again.

When the world was as it once was, we would have shared a meal together in Stotts or at Halal Bros. or Kerbey Lane. We would have shared memories of time spent at the Local or the Crown and Anchor or crawling Rainey Street. We would have reminisced about our time in Galveston, on the Hill, singing terrible karaoke, and the one-too-many jello shots. We would have debated about who was the best professor, about who was the worst professor, and about who we would want to take to our home churches. We would have thanked the other for caring in our moments of loss, moments of immaturity, moments of irresponsibility, moments of fear and danger. We would have laughed at the times we got too drunk, or too overworked, or too worried about grades. We would have embraced one last time, tears in our eyes, whispering words into ears. When the world was as it once was, we would have seen one another's faces one last time. And now, we must part in this manner: at a distance without embrace.

My beloved friends: thank you. Thank you for making my time in seminary memorable, meaningful, and worthwhile. Thank you for loving me unconditionally. Thank you for telling me the truth of who I am in spite of who I say I am. Thank you for caring for me and allowing me to care for you. Thank you for being the body of Christ for me. I will always have for you,

much love. sheth.