

15 March 2020

Being classically educated it is more than a little weird to be writing this pastoral letter on the Ides of March, March 15<sup>th</sup>.

Christians, of all people, are the most prepared for times like these. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an advisory body supported by the federal government, has recommended that all gatherings that surpass 50 people be canceled for the next 8 weeks. This does go through Easter. Quarantining during outbreaks is not unprecedented although the most recent occurrence that we can find is about 70 years ago when polio was still active.

I said that Christians are, of all people, most prepared for times like these. It is because we already have what we need – forgiveness, salvation, and eternity through Christ – those are the lenses through which we see all of life.

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the fledgling church in Rome, wrote in chapter 8:38-39: ***For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

COVID-19 is covered by that list.

We are being advised to limit our public exposure to each other so as to slow down the spread of COVID-19 and ensure that our hospitals, always operating at 2/3 capacity, are able to continue normal operations while absorbing the influx of the Coronavirus patients who will be arriving. This is reasonable.

During times of crisis our leaders and communities are tested. People who are afraid are prey to fear mongers, panic and profiteers. People who are apathetic risk being the cause of other people's illness and death. Out of our Christian love for the other, the love of neighbor, we will at First Lutheran obey the recommendation by the Centers for Disease Control. I am called through my profession to be an expert in preaching, Bible interpretation, and Christian care-giving – I am not a professional in diseases and their spreading. This is the Centers for Disease Control area of expertise and it is their time to lead us and I will obey. By the way, Paul also tells us in Romans 13 that the governing authorities are to be respected because, and I quote, ***“they are God's servants for our good.”***

So we are canceling all worship and meal activities and church meetings here at First Lutheran until advised otherwise. This includes the Bible Studies and Circles, Wednesday soup and pie, both Wednesday worships, Wednesday Night Dinner, Wednesday Nite Live, as well as the Saturday and Sunday worships. This will inconvenience us, if we are very fortunate that is all it will do, and we have grown up in a convenience culture, but we will make it through this. The staff at First Lutheran will continue their faithful work and we will be reachable through all the communication platforms that are available.

Seventy years ago the people suffering through Polio could not have imagined the communication technologies available to us. We will be live streaming and archiving readings and sermons for the next several Wednesdays and Sundays and we will be able to access that part of church life through the church website as well as Facebook and DVDs sent out to those who request them.

In your personal economics during this time please remember your church and the small businesses that are the fabric of small communities. Opportunities to serve our most vulnerable through delivering the groceries members have ordered at Marketplace and WalMart are being organized through the church office and if you are willing to be part of that loving response please let us know.

Our mission statement from 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians will serve us well at this time: ***“Let all that you do be done in love.”***

In Christ’s loving service,

*Pastor Joel*