

April 1, 2020

Responding to COVID-19
Message to the Congregation #5

Dear Faith Family,

I thought about starting this letter with an April Fool's joke, telling everyone we were going to be meeting in our building for Easter Sunday, but it seemed in poor taste, and I was afraid I might offend someone. Instead, I have the sad job of sharing with you that we will not be able to congregate on Easter weekend. We knew it was a long shot, but the consistory tried holding out hope for as long as we could. Unfortunately, the time has come to move our Easter services online. The same goes for all subsequent Sunday services. Until further notice, our church will remain an online fellowship.

Rest assured, this doesn't mean Easter is cancelled (you can't stop Easter!), and we are still planning on having a Good Friday and an Easter Sunday service, both available online. If you haven't joined us for Good Friday before, this is a solemn and reverential service with scripture readings, a couple songs, a shorter message, and a time of reflection and prayer to focus on Christ's death. As far as I'm concerned, it is the most important service we do! Think of it like a Christmas Eve service with a more serious mood. As you'll hear in this week's sermon, you can't have Easter without Good Friday! In fact, you can't have any of the Christian Faith without the crucifixion. So I hope you'll join us in setting aside April 10th as a special day of remembrance and worship.

As far as Easter Sunday is concerned, John, Tanya, Paul and I are going to great lengths to make this the most special online service we've ever created. The Faleys are recording all kinds of new music for us to worship to; I'm planning another exciting sermon; and Paul is doing everything he can to make sure the recordings and package are top-notch. We even have a couple surprises planned for everyone. So whether you're getting together with family or hunkering down in your home, doing indoor egg hunts or going outside for a walk, we hope you'll join us on Easter Sunday!

Lastly, I just want to remind you that this week's online service will include communion. I've been talking with the professor for the sacraments class I am taking, and he agrees that during this unusual time it is ok to get creative and find ways to continue to minister the Lord's Supper even if we have to do it virtually. God knows what we are going through, He sees our hearts, and He appreciates our efforts to draw near to Him so long as we continue to worship in spirit and in truth. Therefore, before you sit down to participate in this week's service, please gather the elements necessary to be able to enjoy this special meal. A simple cup of juice (red or purple is preferable, but even tea or coffee would work if that's all you have) and some bread or crackers (I've even taken communion with tortillas before) will work. The importance is in the remembering and the symbolism we attribute to these elements.

In finishing let me leave you with Psalm 46 in its entirety (emphasis added is mine). It seemed appropriate given the times and really blessed and encouraged me this morning during my devotions.

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

Therefore we *WILL* not fear.

Though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging, there is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.

God is within her, she will not fall. God will help her at break of day.

Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; He lifts His voice, the earth melts.

The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Come and see the works of the Lord, the desolations He has brought on the earth.

He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; He burns the shields with fire.

"Be still and know that I am God;

I *WILL* be exalted among the nations! I *WILL* be exalted in the earth!"

The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Blessings and peace,

Pastor Andrew