

4/29/20

Dear Faith Family,

Lately I've been sensing that people have now grown quite comfortable with COVID-19. By this I don't mean the people who are working on the front lines in the healthcare sector, or those who have actually contracted the virus or who personally know someone who has died from it. Instead I mean the average person for whom the virus is still more or less a distant threat, or who feels like they've probably had it and recovered just fine (whether they were tested or not).

For a lot of people, the fear surrounding the virus has dissipated, and the initial shock and anxiety over this pandemic has been replaced with an acceptance and even at times a nonchalance about it. I'm seeing more people on the road these days, more people in the grocery store (with their masks on top of their heads instead of over their mouths), and even a handful more people at church. We're also seeing more and more protests, people challenging the status quo and eager to have our lives get back to normal. I think we've gotten used to this idea, and, unless the virus is affecting us directly, we've learned to put up with it as an irritant that *could* harm us, but until it actually does, we would rather not think about it. In short, I think we, as a society, are learning to cope with this new reality.

While this may be good or bad, it raises for me the question, have we learned what we were supposed to learn from this? While there are many reasons why God would allow something like this to happen, one of them certainly is to teach us something important, to accomplish a work in us. James 1:2-4 says, "Consider it pure joy my brothers and sisters whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." So we see that at least three of the reasons God allows trials is to help us mature in our faith, to develop spiritual endurance, and even to produce in us joy as we learn to trust in God's sovereign will.

One of the pastors I was talking to this week compared this season to the wilderness experience during the Exodus (he named it the COVID Wilderness). While Israel was leaving Egypt, on their way to the promised land, they were made to wander for 40 years in the desert, until they learned the lessons God required of them. Because of their stubborn refusal to trust God, depend on God, love and fear God, their term was extended and they traveled around in circles until the rebellious generation died off, and the younger generation (free from the baggage of the past) was allowed to enter in.

My hope and prayer is that this virus (and the shelter-in-place restrictions) will soon be gone. But I'm equally fearful that when this is all over, we'll just go back to life as usual, failing to internalize the lessons God wanted to impart to us. This could be even more dangerous than the virus itself, not just because of the concerns over a resurgence of the virus, but because it would necessitate God continuing to use other measures to teach us the spiritual lessons we need. And while it is easy to pass this off as lessons someone else needs to learn, the only thing we can control is whether or not we are learning the lessons God intends for us.

As such, I encourage you during this time to be intentional about asking and seeking what God is saying to *you*. Were there aspects in your previous lifestyle—prior to the Corona Virus—that were unhealthy? Was there an attitude adjustment that needed to be made? Have you realized there were certain things you were taking for granted? Were you taking God for granted? Were there things you once considered necessities that you now realize are actually luxuries? Has this time of isolation revealed in you areas of weakness or maybe even areas of strength you didn't realize you had? Has this season been a struggle for you or a blessing? What does this teach you about yourself and about God? Has there been anything God is calling you to do as part of a more focused life of worship?

Any of these and plenty of other lessons are great discoveries to make. These are the revelations that can help us come to terms with who we really are, our need for God, and His divine purpose for our lives. But the important thing, even the necessary thing, is to make sure we fully wrestle with and embrace them, lest we quickly forget and fall back into our old ways.

Having said that, I urge you to write down any lessons you're learning, then establish some resolutions or goals for how you can apply them to your life moving forward. I would even encourage you to share them with members of the church who can keep you accountable. If you're comfortable, I would love for you to share any lessons you've learned with me, so that I can pray for you and support you in your journey as well. And while many of us are still processing these things, and may not even be able to put them into words yet, I pray that all of us will take this challenge seriously and spend the next few weeks and months considering what God is saying to us. It would be a shame to waste the opportunity this pandemic has provided without tapping into the spiritual discoveries God intended for us to make. After all, we all want this to be over, and would hate to have to go through it again.

May God continue to teach you and reveal Himself to you! And may Christ continually be formed in you, until we all reach maturity in the faith together!

Peace in Jesus,

Pastor Andrew

Special Announcements

- This Sunday is **communion** Sunday. Please prepare yourself (and the elements) to participate in the sacrament as part of our online service.
- Please send any shelter-in-place, Corona Virus-related **pictures** to andrewedmonds@gmail.com for a special gallery we will display when we reopen the church (whenever that is).
- **Youth Sunday School** zoom meetings are Sundays at 11 a.m. Contact pastor Andrew for the zoom link.
- This Friday, May 1, we are planning on having a special **Kids' Zoom Hang-out** at 2 p.m. Contact pastor Andrew for the zoom link.
- Lastly, next Wednesday, May 6th, we will be having a special all-church, **zoom fellowship hour** at 7 p.m. This will be a chance for the adults to hang out, share what's going on, and pray together. Stay tuned and look to our chimp mail for the zoom link for that meeting.