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April 3, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We live in a difficult and strange time. Though the Church has dealt with outbreaks of disease and pandemics in the past, many of us are in uncharted territory. I have sought to be faithful to my calling as your pastor while being as careful and safe as possible. I expect that in the future we will know better what should have been done in our nation, community, and here at church. Please continue to adhere to the recommendations put out by the CDC and the County Department of Health. There are varying opinions on some of the measures put out by the authorities, and perhaps even those steps taken here at Mount Calvary. Whatever your opinion, please continue in gentle kindness and compassion for one another and honor our civil authorities. Let us not judge one another, but recognize that we are in a very unique circumstance. I thank you for your compassion for one another and your concern and support for the congregation these past weeks.

For the immediate future, including Holy Week and Easter, barring changes from the CDC or local government, we will continue to offer the Sacrament to our members who are healthy, comfortable with our measures taken here, and desire it. Please continue to contact me on my cell phone (402)707-1353 if you wish to attend a service so that we can honor the County Health Department's request for no gatherings of patrons larger than 10.

As we enter into Holy Week and Easter, please limit yourself to attending **one** service during the first part of Holy Week (from Saturday April 4 through Wednesday April 8), **one** service from Maundy Thursday through Holy Saturday morning, and **one** service from the evening of April 11 through Easter Wednesday. This will allow as many members as possible to participate in these services.

We are in the process of acquiring and setting up equipment to allow us to livestream services on our website, Lord willing, by Easter (an email from the church office will be sent out once that is set up). Bulletins and sermons will continue to be posted on our website as well.

I am grateful to Rev. Duncan for his volunteer help with the services that have been offered thus far. I am deeply touched by all of you who have been kind and encouraging, willing to help one another, and, while eager for God's gifts and disappointed in all that has been affected, patient. The Lord will and the Lord does provide. Jesus lives. The pandemic and shutdowns do not change this. These days will pass, one way or another. In the meantime, these are our lives and days that we have been given to endure in patience and trust in God's mercy and grace, even as we pray for them to end.

In addition to all the other limitations on our lives and fears, the reality is that most of us won't be in church as much as we normally would be during Holy Week this year. For many of us, it simply hasn't "felt" very much like Lent. To allow your fellow Christians to be able to attend services, I have asked you to limit your own attendance in the very time when we are most accustomed to gather. Let us embrace what we still have as Christians: the Word. God be praised for this! God's Word is what is most essential for our faith and it has not been taken from you. Rejoice in it, recognize that it is a gift, and use it. I hope that you have been able to spend more time in God's Word these past weeks. To aid your Holy Week devotions I have posted a booklet on the church website with readings for Holy Week interspersed with hymn stanzas.

I especially want to encourage those of you who are fathers and mothers. Take these increased hours at home with your children to begin or strengthen your time in regular devotions as a family. The Congregation at Prayer is posted on the website and is a simple way to pray and read God's Word. If you need a Bible or a hymnal, please contact me and I will happily provide one.

If you have any needs during the remainder of this trying time, whether it's help paying bills, getting groceries, you desire prayers or spiritual counsel, please do not hesitate to contact me. We have members willing to help with these needs, and I am always ready to serve you with the promises of God and my prayers!

May God bless and keep you safe, healthy, and firm in faith!

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Gerike