

Thursday, March 12, 2020

Dear Brothers & Sisters,

We want you to know we are in constant prayer and discernment on how to lead and shepherd this congregation. This moment with the Coronavirus pandemic is no different. Our calling is simple, love God and love neighbor. It is, however, not always simple to know exactly how to do this.

We are so thankful that we as a community just finished studying the Book of Ecclesiastes together. One of the main points we learned is that we are to live each day with the knowledge that we don't know what tomorrow brings, but we do know who gives today and tomorrow. Therefore, we should not be afraid, panic or despair, but rather enjoy this fantastic truth. "*The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.*" (Ecclesiastes 12:13 ESV)

As Christians, we follow the God of Truth (John 14:6) and we are to worship him in Spirit and Truth (John 4:24). Therefore we must be people of the truth. There is a lot of misinformation being spread around. As a witness to the world, let us be people that do not spread misinformation.

The following websites are the clearest and most up to date information on the Coronavirus and COVID-19.

<https://www.baystatehealth.org/covid19>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

<https://www.mass.gov/resource/information-on-the-outbreak-of-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>

The commandment is to love God and love neighbor. How do we do this wisely (skillfully living for God) at this moment?

A few suggestions:

1. **Focus on prayer instead of panic.** I know this isn't easy, because things unknown to us bring us to fear easily. Perfect love drives out fear. If you feel yourself starting to panic, open up the Bible, fall on your knees and pray.
2. **Review your hand washing and public hygiene practices.** Washing your hands for 20 seconds is a lot longer than most of us are used to. How about reciting your favorite scripture verse during hand washing?
3. **If you are sick or symptomatic--please stay home.** We don't want to spread the disease around our community or to those that are most vulnerable and high-risk.
4. **Social distancing doesn't have to mean emotional distancing.** It may be wise to stay away from public gatherings as much as possible but it doesn't mean we should disconnect from each other. This may be inconvenient for a moment but our modern

world allows us to stay connected in new ways. These mediums may not be ideal, but they are just momentary. We are working hard to establish ways we can stay connected and care for you in the case that we have to cancel any public worship or gatherings. We will pray as Paul says, *“But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face,”* (1 Thessalonians 2:17, ESV).

5. **Communicate with us.** Please don't isolate yourself. We want to know how we can pray and care for each other--all the time.
6. **Be people of truth:** The news we watch and read often increase our implicit bias and turn into unloving acts or words. This is our time to care for others and share the love and hope of Jesus Christ, which delivers us from sin and eternal death.
7. **Pray for your Pastor and other elders:** We are diligently in prayer and discerning together to make the wise and loving decisions for our congregation, community, and God.

If we continue to worship face to face, we will be:

- Reviewing current social practices that might unintentionally spread the virus.
- Taking measures to do extra cleaning of the church--knowing that just like our sin-stained hearts, we can't clean everything perfectly.

If we momentarily suspend public gatherings because it is mandated or we deem it the most loving option, we will be:

- Developing plans for ways to enhance our digital means to connect in worship, study, and pray together.

We do not take any of this lightly. We appreciate your patience, prayer, and communication with and for us. We love you all. We will be continuing to update all of you with any and all decisions.

Your grateful and humble servants,

The Session of Christ Presbyterian Church

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