



Dear Saints of St. John,

We find ourselves facing a situation new to us, but certainly not new to the Church. Since man's fall into sin, the entirety of God's creation has been plagued (pun intended) with disease and pestilence. The Corona virus (COVID-19) is just the latest in a long list of pandemic events.

And yet worry, concern, and questions abound: "How is the virus spread?" "How can I best avoid contracting it?" "What preparations should I make in case of mandated isolation?" "How can I care for my loved ones who are most vulnerable?" "What time is the 9:00 service tomorrow?"

All great questions! (Especially the last one; Church is at 9:00.) As Christians we have dual identities, citizenship in two kingdoms. The kingdom of the left is where God works His will through those who serve Him (knowingly or unknowingly) from positions of authority and leadership. The kingdom of the right is where God works His will through the Church and those He has called to shepherd His people. Two distinct realms, intimately intertwined.

The Governor of Minnesota (kingdom of the left), Tim Walz, has declared a Peacetime State of Emergency. He "strongly suggests" that gathering size be limited, and that we observe a "social space" of six feet. The mayor of Wadena, George Deiss, may find it necessary to add additional sanctions. The Minnesota Department of Health (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/>) has also issued guidelines to avoid further spreading of the virus: Wash hands; don't touch your face; avoid unnecessary contact and exposure; if you're sick, STAY HOME!; get medical attention as needed.

As citizens of this kingdom, we honor God by obeying the Fourth Commandment which says we should fear and love God by honoring, serving, obeying, loving, and cherishing those whom God has placed over us at home, in government, at school, at the place we work, and in the church.

You all know your places as citizens of the kingdom of the right—the Holy, Christian Church. For our good, God has commanded that we "remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy." This means that we are to devote ourselves to the preaching of the Word, the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42, 46), and to not give up meeting together, but to encourage one another (Hebrews 10:25). Jesus says, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

So what does all this mean to us as citizens of both kingdoms living in a state of emergency?

First of all, for the time being, we will continue to gather together for Worship, Sunday School, Bible class, and Mid-Week Lenten services at the regularly scheduled times. Should it become necessary to adjust those schedules, we will. Rest assured that we will observe all sanitary precautions, and urge you to do the same. But as God's people, the church is our Emergency Operating Center. We look to the Lord to give us everything that we need for this body and life; it is where we go to receive the one thing you can receive nowhere else—the medicine of immortality.

Now, should you contract the Corona virus, or any one of the myriad maladies floating around today, please seek medical attention. Do what they tell you to do. Take the medicine they tell you take. Let someone know that you are ill or homebound, and LET THEM come alongside you and help. Don't deprive them of the opportunity to use their gifts. The Fifth Commandment says that not only should we not hurt our neighbor, but we should help and support him! And please, please, please let me know.

For the time being, we will forgo our traditional "sharing of the peace;" offering plates will not be passed, but placed in the narthex after the service; elders will sanitize hands before and after preparation of the elements in the Lord's Supper, as well as before and after assisting me in distribution. Each of you are also asked to pay particular attention to cleanliness. We encourage prudence, but not panic. If you choose not to attend worship, please let me know.

As for me, I will continue to serve the Lord and His Church according to the Call I received through you, His people. Following a long list of servants from biblical times to present, I will not needlessly insert myself into risky situations, but neither will I shy away from doing the things I have been given to do: preaching the Word in purity and truth; administering the Sacrament; visiting the sick and homebound; bringing comfort to the distressed; baptizing, marrying, and burying.

In summary, while we take all necessary precautions to keep ourselves safe, we rest in the Lord and His promise to work all things together for the good of those called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. He says, "Be still and know that I am God (Psalm 46); I will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). One day, I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am you may be also (John 14:3)."

Come, Lord, quickly, but grant me the patience to wait on You. Amen.

See you in church!

Pastor M. <†>