



2020-03-18

Hello Cornerstone Family,

I am sure you will agree that this has been quite the rollercoaster of a week. It seems that daily, even hourly, things are changing and it doesn't appear to be slowing down. Communities all over the country are shutting down businesses and severely limiting services that we took for granted just a week ago. Many businesses are wondering if they will survive this onslaught on their livelihood. The stock market fluctuates daily like the tide. As a result, many people are allowing fear and irrationality to control their behavior (thus the run on toilet paper -- crazy!).

Instead of seeing this as some *apocalyptic end of the world as we know it* movie, we should determine to see it from God's point of view. We have an unprecedented opportunity to share the love of Christ with others. Think about it. We have a God who never changes, who created the universe with His spoken Word, whose power is undiminished. The Scriptures teach us that He is still on the throne and He has purposes for all that happens in our world **and** in our personal lives. We won't always understand His reasons, but we can fully trust Him. That is Jesus' point in Matthew 6. (Please open your Bible or app and read the whole context.)

***Matt. 6:25-26*** "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? . . .

***Matt. 6:33-34*** **But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness**, and all these things will be added to you. "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Just like Jesus' listeners, there are many things involved with this coronavirus that we have absolutely no control over. But we have complete control over what we pursue! Jesus tells us to pursue the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, . . . ***first and foremost***. We let God handle the things that only He can control. In our current situation, I believe at the heart of this *pursuit* is loving the people God has placed in our lives. We obviously need to figure out how to do this within the governmental guidelines that has become known as *social distancing*. Our key motivating factor is expressed for us by the Apostle Paul in Philippians 2:3-4:

*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Each of you has to figure out how to do this in the context you find yourself. Please don't wait for the church to organize something for you to participate in. In light of our forced isolation, we all have to pray for God to show us what and how to accomplish this. In a very intriguing book called "***The Rise of Christianity***," Sociologist Rodney Stark documents that during the epidemics and plagues of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, great fear caused people to abandon their own family members in the streets. It was the Christians who took care of them at the risk of their own lives. Christianity grew exponentially because Christians loved their neighbors when the Worldview of the Roman world failed people miserably. ***Is this our opportunity?*** Please pray about what God is asking you to do.

Now to some practical matters: ***what are we going to do about our Sunday Service?*** Very few people within a 100-mile radius of our church have been affected by this virus; but the CDC and local governmental guidelines are *designed to keep it that way*. In light of that, we will honor those recommendations and requirements. Therefore, ***we will be holding our Sunday morning service online for the next 2 weeks***. We will have musical worship and teaching like always, but you get to participate from the isolated comfort of your own home. (Sorry, I am trying to bring a little humor into this.) Darrel and his team are working on the technical details of that now and ***we will inform you in a day or two about how to access our online Sunday Service***.

My friend Jesse Richardson, who pastors Sierra Bible Church in Truckee, has reported that 1,500 people watched their service online last Sunday. That is amazing! We need to see this as an opportunity for outreach, not just a restriction on what we can do. We, the Elders, hate the idea that we cannot meet together in person; but let's not see this as a step backwards but rather as an opportunity to get the message out to a much wider audience. Evidently, people are tuning in to these church services as they sit at home. They are realizing that their beliefs about life do not provide meaningful answers; ***so, let's give them the answer***.

I will leave you with this quote by Martin Luther that he penned during the Black Plague (I got this from Jesse's post to his church):

*"Very well, by God's decree, the enemy has sent us poison and deadly offal. Therefore, I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine, and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance infect and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person, but will go freely."*

On behalf of the Elders, we are honored to serve you.  
Pastor Tony