

May 8, 2020 – Friday of the Fourth Week of Easter

Dearest Saints in Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who has power to heal and to save (Luke 5:17).

Last week, I wrote to you both to inform and to reassure you regarding the lifting of limitations on gatherings for worship. I am writing to you again this week to do the same. The church council met virtually on May 7 to discuss specific guidelines for when we are able to reopen. These guidelines are included with this letter. As of today, our plan is to begin holding smaller services beginning Sunday, May 17. This may be changed in the next week if the situation worsens. If it does, we will let the congregation know.

I want to offer a couple notes about the guidelines. First, for those wishing to attend a service, it is *required* that you follow them. They are not optional suggestions. As I wrote last week, I know that they may seem burdensome, maybe even unnecessary, but they have been compiled using recommendations from public health organizations and from pastors and churches who have already been able to hold smaller services. Please look them over carefully. Second, the guidelines will change over time. When the virus wanes, we will slowly be able to return to normal. As this happens, we will produce updated guidelines to send out to the congregation. *This is will not last forever.*

I also want to offer some encouragement. Please ***do not feel guilty*** about not coming if you are not able or do not feel comfortable. If you cannot or do not attend in these initial weeks, you may take advantage of the livestreamed video until you do feel comfortable attending. Pastor will continue not only streaming the services and offering devotions, but checking in through phone calls and email. We want everyone to be safe and to have the opportunity to hear God's Word and receive his gifts as they are able.

God is a God of peace and not of fear! Paul wrote to Timothy, *God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control* (2 Timothy 1:7). John also wrote, *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear* (1 John 4:18). We have again the freedom to gather, but we will not fall victim either to fear or to fatalism ("I'm going to do what I want because it doesn't matter anyway"). Christians don't live in fear, but in the sure and certain hope that God can and will save us. Christians also don't abuse freedom, but act in love toward their neighbors. May God increase our faith and fill us with his love!

In Christ's Love,
Pastor Squire