

April 2, 2020 – Thursday of Lent 5

Dearest Saints in Jesus Christ, the King of Kings,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who rules over the kingdom of God in the heavens and the earth forever and ever (Revelation 11:15).

I have pledged to continue to write to you on a weekly basis. I want to keep in touch with all of you during this unusual and uncertain time, and this is one way to do that – both to reassure and to offer resources for continuing to be in the Word of God on a regular basis. As I have written before, we are living through something that none of us has ever had to experience. The quick spread of the virus, along with the scope of preventative measures and lockdowns, has thrown many of our lives upside down. Not much seems ‘usual’ anymore, and it is hard to figure out how to move forward with certain parts of our lives. This is certainly true of our lives in the congregation. We will have, on April 5, missed three midweek Lent services and three Sunday morning services. As you might imagine, we will miss any number of services more through the end of April, including Holy Week and Easter. This virus is not going to disappear overnight, but instead creates a much longer term set of circumstances than we hoped. But, despite all of it, Christ is *still* risen and is victorious over sin and death! Praise God!!

In the meantime, I have been recording daily devotions on the congregation’s YouTube channel, which are live-streamed at 9:30 AM and recorded for use anytime thereafter. The links are also being posted on the congregation’s Facebook page. Sunday mornings, I have also been live-streaming/recording a service for use at home. For those of you who do not have access to this technology, we have been sending out the sermon manuscripts from Sunday mornings to you by mail. If you are not getting one and would like to receive them, please call the church office. By now, many of you who did not have hymnals before might have ‘loaner’ hymnals from the church at home. If you do not, but wish to have one, please let us know, and we will find a way to get you one (you are certainly also welcome to buy one from Concordia Publishing House).

We thank God that we live in a time in which we have the technology to do recording like these to provide continued support for daily devotional life. But, we also recognize that this is not normal. That might seem obvious, but it is worth pointing out. No audio recordings, video recordings, YouTube, Facebook, or anything else, can replace what the Body of Christ does whenever it can. No technology can replicate the reality of coming together in corporate worship (Hebrews 10:25), hearing the Word of God preached and proclaimed together, praying together with one voice, communing together at the Lord’s Table, or learning God’s Word in Bible study and Sunday school. These online resources and recordings are not meant to replace – and can never replace – what can only be done together in person. For now, though, this is the best we can do safely, and we will continue to do what we can.

Speaking of the Lord’s Supper, it grieves my heart that this is the 32nd day since we have received the body and blood of Jesus – given and shed for us for the forgiveness of our sins – together in worship. It is unfortunate enough that we often go 20 days in between celebrating

it under normal circumstances, despite the biblical and historical examples of the Christian Church. For instance, the believers in the early Christian Church *devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the **breaking of the bread** and the prayers* (Acts 2:42). The clear example of Church history is that, for well over 1,500 years, the Sacrament was celebrated at least every Sunday, but often even more frequently (whether daily Mass was offered or whether it was offered on feast/festival days). Our own Lutheran Confessions clearly state that "We hold one communion every holy-day [Sunday], and, if any desire the Sacrament, also on other days, when it is given to such as ask for it. And this custom is not new in the Church..." (AC XXIV, 34-35). This is all to say that, we Lutherans hold the Sacrament in high regard and desire to have it as much as possible, because in it Jesus offers his very body and blood for our forgiveness, life, and salvation. What a blessed, eternal gift!

I have seen this desire and this longing among a number of you. Several people have inquired about the possibility of receiving the Lord's Supper in some way, if possible. Few things bring my heart so much joy as to hear this! I, too, desire to receive the Holy Supper, and I long to find some way to share this gift with the people who also seek it. However, with the virus now confirmed in our county – and all but assured to reach our town, if it is not already here – there is simply no safe and responsible way to celebrate the Lord's Supper together until the current situation is no longer an immediate crisis. That is not to say that we have not tried to think of ways to do it. Leaving aside the absolute non-starters (e.g. 'online' Communion done at home), some churches have tried to have small groups (10 individuals or less) come in at set times and practice social distancing, as to still be able to receive the Sacrament. Others have tried to do 'drive-in' services where the Sacrament is distributed to people in their vehicles. But, none of the options we have thought of works for one reason or another, whether because of safety issues (making sure everything is properly disinfected in between groups), or because we do not want to turn the Lord's Supper into a superstition or absurdity. This absolutely breaks my heart, because nothing would be better than to find some way to commune together as the Body of Christ. But, as it has been pointed out by any number of people throughout the Christian Church, sometimes the Lord leads his people into a fast. Jesus himself fasted for 40 days in the wilderness, proclaiming to the devil that *man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God* (Matthew 4:4). Now, we can consider ourselves as the Church in exile, cast into the wilderness, driven toward repentance and prayer. Now, we weep for our sins. Now, we confess our sins to God and cry out for forgiveness. Now, we repent and turn to God. Now, we rely on God's Word more than ever to bring us through.

Please, also, do not forget your 'neighbors' during this time. There are people in our church who could use a phone call, a letter, an email, or prayer from you (especially health care workers!). There are those who could use help with getting supplies to them. Please reach out. Please stay in contact. And please remember that the ministry of the Church has not stopped. Help in any way you can. *Love is the fulfilling of the law* (Romans 13:10). And it is *by this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another* (John 13:35).

In Christ's Love,
Pastor Squire