

March 17, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Coronavirus; CoVid-19; live cases; community spread; no groups larger than 500..., 250..., 50..., 10... . As we have watched and listened to the news swirling around us, descriptive phrases from God's Word may come to mind:

- “For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves... groan within ourselves... [Romans 8:22-23].
- “...I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...” [Psalm 23:4]
- “...tribulation, ...distress, ...persecution, ...famine, ...nakedness, ...peril, ...sword, ...being put to death all day long ...considered as sheep to be slaughtered” [Romans 8:35-36].

These can seem to be dark days within which God's curse upon the creation because of human disobedience and sin echoes loudly. However, it is in times like these that we must remember the full counsel of God's Word and the contexts surrounding the descriptions above:

- “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! ... Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ... I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ...the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ...even [though] we ourselves groan within ourselves, [we wait] eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently” [Romans 7:24-25; 8:1, 18ff].
- “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. ... Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. ... Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” [Psalm 23:1, 4, 6].
- “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. ... What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all — how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ...

But in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” [Romans 8:28, 31ff, 37ff].

Our God reigns! When things appear to be in chaos and confusion our God is in control! Our God has achieved full victory over Satan, sin, and death and any instrumentalities that they may use to attack us, a victory that we share through faith in Jesus our Lord, God, and Savior! No matter what the Lord may allow to befall us in this earthly life, we will not perish, but will be bodily raised to an eternal life in the presence of our gracious, loving God where Coronaviruses, CoVid-19, sickness, death, and the like will be no more! Therefore, we can approach and live in these days without fear! Thanks be to God in Jesus!

In the last several days, the leadership of Mt. Olive Lutheran Church and School have been in ongoing communication with each other. Meetings of the Action Board, Board of Elders, Finance Committee, and School Boards were held last evening at which decisions were made about how the congregation and school will handle the current health situation in the coming days and weeks. A separate email blast will be coming from our Principal Cory Emily regarding decisions made with respect to the school. I will outline below the decisions that have been made with respect to the congregation:

- Officials at the federal, state, and local levels of government — the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Governor Kim Reynolds, and Mayor Frank Cownie, respectively — have mandated that groups of people shall not exceed 10 in size for the next four weeks. Therefore, all face-to-face activities of Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, including worship, committee and board meetings, fellowship and outreach events, and the like between now and Easter Sunday (April 12) are hereby cancelled.
- Although our face-to face activities are cancelled for the next four weeks, this does not mean that the ministry of our congregation is grinding to a halt. It simply means that we are going to have to find other ways to carry out the Lord’s mission. The precise details of these other ways will be worked out over the coming days and weeks. However, please note the following:
  - God tells us that “you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” and that the members are to “have the same care for one another.” Therefore, during this time when we will not be routinely seeing one another, please check in on one another by telephone, text message, email, etc. If you become aware that someone is in need, please call or text me immediately on my cell phone: [515-721-4737](tel:515-721-4737). Please do not assume that someone else will call. I would rather hear about a need from multiple people than not hear about it at all.
  - Relatedly, if you or a member of your family has a need, spiritual or otherwise, do not hesitate to call me. If it is 3:00 am and you are in need of prayer, call me. That is why God has brought me to Mt. Olive. I intend to be reaching out to members of the congregation by telephone. However, because of the number of Mt. Olive members, do not wait for me to get to you. Call me; it won’t be a bother!
  - Worship will continue! The intent is to post a worship service online each weekend. The exact format will be determined upon my return to Des Moines after Spring Break (late evening this coming Sunday, March 22). I am anticipating that there will be some worship music, Scripture readings, a Sermon, and prayers. If you have specific matters which you would like included in the prayers, please text them to me on my cell number or email them to me at [mark.kleckner@molcs.org](mailto:mark.kleckner@molcs.org).

To view recorded sermons or service online there are two options at this time:

- (1) Go to the church and school Facebook page at either:
    - [@molcsdsm](#), or
    - <https://www.facebook.com/molcsdsm>  
and look for recent video posts. OR
  - (2) Go to the church website (<https://molcs.org/church/>)
    - Click on “Sermons and Media” & select the one you wish to watch.
- The Lord’s Supper will be available beginning the weekend of March 28-29. As I’m picturing it now, I will have the Lord’s Supper available in the parking lot during both the regular Saturday, 5:00 pm, and Sunday, 9:00 am, worship times. If you drive into the parking lot, I will commune you in your cars. This way you can receive the Lord’s Body and Blood with the forgiveness of sins, while at the same time keeping your needed “social distance” and minimizing the virus exposure risk to yourself.
- While we can accomplish much of a worship service online, there is something we can’t do. We can’t pass an offering plate! While the heart, core, and center of Jesus’ mission is not money, it takes money to accomplish Jesus’ mission of making disciples. Even if you were to take a four week break from your life as usual, your expenses likely would not change much. The same will be true for Mt. Olive Lutheran Church and School. Although our utility bills may drop slightly without people in the building, the vast majority of our expenses are fixed and ongoing. Therefore, it is critical that we continue to receive your tithes and offerings. Our budget is extremely lean; there is no fat in the expenses to cut; and our revenue margins are paper thin. Please prayerfully ask the Lord to guide your offering response to His mission in this time of crisis.
- You may submit your offerings in one of two ways. 1) You can mail them to the church. 2) You can submit them online. If you are going to submit them online, do the following:
- Go to Mt. Olive Lutheran Church’s website (<https://molcs.org/church/>).
  - Hover over the “About Mt. Olive” link at the top of the page.
  - Click on “Donate” in the drop-down menu.
  - Follow the online instructions.
  - If you have questions about online donation, call Paul Brown at 515-249-8405; he will be happy to help you.

Since this email blast now exceeds the length of a number of New Testament Epistles, let me close with the Word of God through St. Paul in his First Letter to the Thessalonians, chapter 5:

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ... Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it. ... The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you” (vss 16-18, 23-24, 28). Amen.

*Blessings, Pastor Mark Kleckner*