

19 March 2020

Dear Friends,

With the Prime Minister's announcement of numerous strategies to combat the spread of the Covid19 virus and our own Archbishop's announcement that church services be suspended till further notice, we find ourselves in 'interesting times'. We will be following this recommendation and will not be having our regular church services. The church will continue to be opened each day for prayer and quiet reflection. We will be producing notices with the message 'Closed for Services, Open for service!'

One of the great blessings of times like this is it shakes us out of our complacency and inertia. We worship a creative God and so we need to be creative too. As important as our gatherings are, just consider this verse from Hebrews:

"And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds,<sup>25</sup> not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10:24-25

The writer is encouraging us to meet together, but what comes before that is to consider how we can 'provoke one another to love and good deeds' and then after the injunction to meet together, it says 'encouraging one another'. So there's a lot we are called to do in our daily Christian life aside from the happenings on a Sunday morning.

In this time of perplexing change we have to work out how we do spur one another on, and encourage each other, when a major part of our Christian fellowship has been removed. Small groups will be very important for us now as a body. In case you equate a small group with a bible study group, consider these 'small groups' that meet regularly within the life of our church - Mother's Union, Family Group, RLT, Men's BBQ, Meditation Group, ESL, Tuesday Bible Studies, Choir, Healing Service, Taizé, Sunday School. Each of these small gatherings will be critical to ensure that 'social distancing' doesn't become 'social isolation'.

Jesus said 'when two or three gather in my name I am in their midst'. We need to have that perspective as well. Now is the time for us to trust God, meet together whenever we can and encourage one another as best we can. This time of uncertainty can be a time where we turn more expectantly to God so we come out the other side be much stronger and committed in our faith.

An important thing to remember with all these restrictions to church services is that they are in place for the vulnerable. We might be healthy and well but brush up against someone who is unaware they are a carrier and then come in contact with an elderly, vulnerable person and unintentionally infect them. Toilet paper hoarding shows where the values of many in our society lie. As followers of Jesus however, we are to look beyond our own needs and desires to the needs of others. Our church building may be closed for services but God's church must always be open to serve. Service means sacrifice.

It may also be helpful to remember that there are Christians in other countries where they cannot meet together at all and it's in many of these places that the church is growing.

May we all discover new blessings pouring upon us through this disruption to our normal routines of life.

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