

Good morning,

I am sure by now most of you have heard the governor's directive, given yesterday, regarding a phased re-opening of the state (I have attached a document that outlines the phased re-opening). I imagine that many of you are curious and wondering what this will mean for upcoming gatherings at Whitefish Naz. First, let me share with you one of the things I am reminded of during this time.

The mission of the Church is not merely to gather on Sunday morning, sing songs, hear a message, receive communion, and fellowship. All those things are important, but Sunday morning is not the summed total of the Church's mission. The mission of the Church, as we learned a couple of years ago in "Missional Essentials," is to join God in HIS mission for the world. Thankfully no virus, quarantine, or shelter at home order can stop the people of God from creatively carrying out his ongoing mission. I have been blessed to witness the way many of you have continued to be people on mission even though the physical doors of the Church are closed. Thank you, and keep it up.

I have processed overnight the decision about re-opening and quite honestly have felt uneasy about the idea of re-opening this immediately. I was on a call this morning with several other area pastors as well as a representative from Flathead County Health Department, and this call helped confirm my uneasiness. I think there are a couple of factors at play.

First, is the health and safety of our people, and our ability to provide/maintain adequate social distancing and safety measures. One of the things said by the health department representative was in regards to the next 2-3 weeks. While it seems numbers are dropping in our area, they will be monitoring extensively as phase 1 goes into effect to see if, in fact, we are moving beyond this.

Second, while there is great value in the body of Christ gathering together for worship, we also must remember the importance of our witness to the community. What we do and what we don't do sends a message to our community. The message we must send to our community is one of love, compassion, and care. I believe at this moment, one of the ways we can do this is by acting with caution. Third, we have a responsibility of care for our congregation. As I interact with people in our church, it seems that most people are taking extreme caution. I would say the majority of the people I talk to are, for the most part staying home. I do not anticipate that will change overnight because of the governor's statement. I believe caution demonstrates both love and care for our people.

Finally, when looking at the parameters laid out in phase 1 of re-opening, it is highly unlikely we will be able to maintain those with much success. I believe we need time to plan and prepare for the best ways to implement proper parameters when we do eventually open.

While I look forward to the day when we will gather again, and I do not relish the idea of additional Sunday's preaching only to a camera, (I was not made to be a televangelist) for the time being we will remain closed for Sunday worship gatherings. We will continue to provide a live-stream on Sunday mornings at 10:15. While it is different than being in person, these have still been rich times of worship and word, so please join us.

Also, I would encourage you to invite someone. An online live-stream is a very non-threatening way to introduce your friends to your church.

After consulting with the church board I hope to communicate by the middle of next week a timeline for re-opening.

Until we meet again, may you continue to be the Church, God's people on mission.

Blessings

Pastor Jason