

PANDEMIC & THE 2ND GREATEST COMMANDMENT

1 John 5:12, “Whoever has the Son has life.”

Our world changed this week. Wednesday is the day I saw it happen around me.

- Tuesday it felt like a different world.
- We knew coronavirus was out there, but in other places, not here.
- “Only two reported cases in the entire state of Wisconsin,” is what I read on the UW website from the Wisconsin Dept of Health on Tuesday.
- By Wednesday the world changed.
- By Thursday and Friday, state and national States of Emergency had been declared.
- No one knows how much the virus itself has actually arrived here yet, but the fear of it and the precautions against it have arrived.
- Yes, our corner of the world changed, but Christ has not changed! Whoever has the Son has life, true life, eternal life. Life that no biological virus can take away.



Some are feeling anxious. Some are rolling their eyes thinking that this is all over-reaction.

- In times like this especially, we need to remember the basics that Jesus taught us, “Trust God, and love your neighbor as yourself.”
- These days we can add one more line, “Trust God. Love your neighbor as yourself. And wash your hands for at least 20 seconds.” That too, you see, is one way we need to act out that commandment to “Love our neighbors as ourselves.”

Loving our neighbors as ourselves is why all these safety protocols are going into effect. It is why we must talk about it even in places like church, because church is a place where people come together, and we all have not yet caught up with taking this seriously yet.

Do you know this word from the world of contagious diseases, vector?

- A vector is the means by which the disease spreads. The vector is the vehicle or carrier of the disease.
- With a virus, any one of us can unknowingly become the vector that spreads the disease to someone else.
- You might feel fine or have symptoms so mild you don’t realize you have the virus, yet still pass it on to someone else more susceptible to dangerous or even deadly consequences.

Many are still thinking that the safety protocols and closings are overblown panic, but the experts say they are not. It’s how the spread of the disease is slowed and more manageable.

Well, yes, there is plenty of overblown panic out there. All you had to do was to go to Woodman's or Costco or Walmart this week to see that.

- People, you are not shopping for the end of the world!
- Stocking up a little is a safety precaution in case you or someone in your household is exposed and you need to go into a self-imposed quarantine in your own house for the proscribed 2 weeks.
- Even so, you're not alone. If you have a phone and a friend, and a church like ours, I just bet we could find someone to drop off a little help for you at your front door if you got in a pinch.
- You don't need enough toilet paper to last until 2025. At worst, you just need two weeks' worth!

Here at Ascension - like the schools, like every responsible church around us - we're shutting a lot of things down for a while. We are modifying our worship services today. We are doing that out of protective love because with viruses, we're all in this together.

It may be soon, that like in other states, we here may also need to discontinue even our worship services for a couple of weeks. We'll see, but we need to be ready for that.

I liked this advice I read for churches in Christianity Today – “Your church’s worship will change. Hold tight to what is sacred—and hold everything else loosely.”

- What is sacred is Christ. What is sacred is the word and grace of God.
- What is sacred is one another in how we are joined together as the body of Christ.
- What is sacred are the vulnerable among us.
- Everything else, we can hold a little loosely for now.



Holding things a little loosely is a form of love and safety now. “Social Distancing” it’s called. Like firebreaks are used to slow and defeat wildfires.

- Not touching. Not grouping too tightly. Social Distancing is a necessary protective measure.
- But Social Isolation is also dangerous in other ways.
- How you guard the front door is what creates the vulnerability of your back door.
- Just one example, nursing homes have gone into lockdown now, a good and necessary protection. Yet, how long before the loved ones there start suffering from acute loneliness?
- Relationship is one of the sacred things we need to keep holding tightly too now. So, our group challenge is how we can facilitate supportive relational connection in the midst of necessary social distancing?

If things get worse here as they might for a while, we'll all need to be intentional and proactive care-teams for each other. Others will need us. We will need others. We all need to initiate and can't wait for the other person to make the call.

We really should be care teams for each other already. And I'm proud of so many of you because so many here at Ascension are exactly that, care teams for each other.

- A man came into his pastor in a panic this week. He's an alcoholic and his AA meeting group has been temporarily shut down. He depends on his group. The pastor said, "A bicycle tire has spokes. We need to build the spokes for your wheel. Let's name 5 people who can be that for you, even if just by phone or computer." So, they did just that. The man found hope again knowing he could still have his group in another way.
- A lot of us have plenty of social connection right in our homes, but a lot of us don't.
- A lot of us can be too uncomfortable to ask for the community connection we really need. We'd rather suffer in our loneliness than admit our need for social connection, our need for someone else just to talk to every now and then. If that's you or someone you know, please reach out and connect.
- Be a vector for good.

We really are all connected. For better or worse. In good times and in bad. This oneness and connectedness of us all is actually very helpful for understanding the biblical message of salvation.

- The Christian doctrine of original sin is that sin is a virus that has infected us all. Everyone has it. Sin is a fatal disease. It's not that "they," the bad people, have it, and "we," the good people, don't have it. We all have it. We're all in this together. We are all fallen this way, and its terminal. No matter how good you try to be, it's still fatal.
- The Bible says the vector for original sin was one man, Adam. Romans 5:12, "*Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin.*" One man, but then sin replicated in us all. We're all in this together.

Likewise, the Christian doctrine of salvation is that salvation was also made possible for all through just one man.

- The Bible says that the vector for salvation was the one man, Jesus Christ. Romans 5:15 says, "*For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many.*"
- Jesus is unique. There aren't any other effective sin cures out there. But that's okay because we're all in this together. The gift of eternal life that came only through the one vector, Jesus, is able to save us all and is offered to us all. "*Whoever has the Son has life.*"

We are living through an historic moment. Above all else, hold tightly to Jesus. You might be anxious in these confusing days. You might just still be annoyed by it all. Either way, hold tightly to Jesus, stay connected to the body of Christ, and be a vector for God's good in this fallen world. We'll get through this together. Amen.