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Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus,

Several weeks ago a member came up to me asking if I had heard of Coronavirus. I said, of course I had and that it wasn't here yet and I'd worry about it when it got here. That was foolish of me. To that member, and you know who you are, I apologize. A week and a half ago I started having conversations about Communion. I said I wasn't worried, we'll increase our transparency in cleanliness and carry on like we had. That was, also, foolish of me. A week ago Saturday, March 7th, my daughter went to Madrid. I had been keeping the Coronavirus/COVID-19 on my radar, but it seemed contained in certain places in Spain. There were cases, yes, but nothing too bad. As of Tuesday of this last week, six days ago, she has been in quarantine because her host parents, and possibly her through her travels in Madrid (although she promises she practiced extremely good cleanliness), were in contact with people who later tested positive for Coronavirus. She is still under self-imposed quarantine in Torrelavega, Spain. I have watched Coronavirus spread throughout Spain, even with their limited testing, to the point where the Spanish government have instituted a State of Emergency and locked the country down. I have been relentlessly devouring any factual information presented to us by the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control. Last night (Sunday) the CDC encouraged no gatherings that draw diverse communities together over 50 people. From watching Spain, and beginning, finally, to understand the exponential growth* curve of the Coronavirus transmission as it begins its path through our communities, I participated in the decision to call off church in anticipation of an announcement like this. I have moved, I pray, from foolishness to seriousness.

I am writing to encourage you who I dearly love as a gift and a blessing from God into my life, to take seriously the precautions that are needed for those over the age of 60 and those who are immunocompromised (like myself, with diabetes), as the consequences of this disease are far more significant in these groups. As we approach Easter, we are reminded of the gift of life eternal and resurrection for us all that Jesus promises, but we also in our earthly lives may join in being as wise as serpents in our care of selves and our care of our communities. To that end, I have had several volunteers step forward to express a willingness to assist with any food/necessity shopping that you would need and deliver them to you with no contact. I am happy to be able to coordinate such an effort. I know many of you have family that you will also rely upon during this time, but I want to make sure that you know that we are here for you.

There are many things we do not know, but there are many things we do. We have come to trust in Jesus for his grace into our lives, and we will continue to do so. Luther always pointed to sin, death and the power of the devil as our real enemies, and today is no different than a week ago when it comes to that. We can be people who trust God and people who trust what the Scientific field of epidemiology has learned and is trying to share. While many are wrestling with what news sources to

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trust, I have not yet heard a misstatement from Dr. Anthony Fauci of the National Institutes of Health, and the guidance of the CDC and WHO is critical as well in this time. In addition, the Minnesota Department of Health is providing information about the spread of Coronavirus in our state. I provide links to these resources below.

World Health Organization - <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

High Risk Precautions/Strategy - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>

National Institutes of Health - <https://www.nih.gov/health-information/coronavirus>

Minnesota Department of Health - <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/index.html>

* Incredibly essential to the development of my thinking on exponential growth curves has been this example from a webpage (<http://micawberprinciple.com/the-expanding-lily-pad-a-retirement-riddle-1212/>) that is talking about finance, but the principle of exponential growth is the same as that of this virus. I was not a math major, so it took me some time to understand it. This really helped to clear it up for me.

“There is an old riddle about a lily pad in a pond. The lily pad doubles in size every day and after 30 days it completely covers the pond. On what day does the lily pad cover half the pond? If you answered without really thinking about it you probably answered “day 15”. Our mind automatically goes to this answer because we are comfortable with linear thinking. If the lily pad covers the entire pond in 30 days then it must cover half the pond in 15 days. Of course, if you stopped to think about it you would realize that the lily pad only covers half the pond on day 29. It then doubles one final time and covers the entire pond on day 30.

A more interesting question is, how much of the pond would the lily pad have covered on day 15? Take a second and write down an estimate. The correct answer is that the lily pad will only have covered .0031% (3 thousandths of one percent) of the pond on day 15. In fact, the lily pad will only cover more than one percent of the pond on day 24. What makes this riddle difficult is that the lily pad’s growth is exponential, not linear. Our minds are comfortable with linear growth. Linear growth is easy to envision and we are fairly good at estimating things that grow linearly. However, we struggle to envision exponential growth and our estimating skills often fail us.”

Whatever is next, we face it with confidence in our Savior and love for our neighbor, just like Jesus instructed us to do – Love God, and love each other. We will continue to be in contact with you.

In the deep love of Jesus,

Rev. Andrew P. Thompson
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