

Good evening, Christ Redeemer Family.

I hope and pray this email finds you healthy and resting in our Father's sovereign control of all things. It is so good to remember that, for those who trust in Christ, nothing comes our way in this life that has not first passed through the hands of a God who loves us, a God who is always, in all situations, working for the eternal good of His people and to fulfill His purposes on this earth. **The coronavirus is not king. God is!** He is still on the throne, still in control, and somehow using even this virus for His glory and the eternal joy of His people (Rom 8:28-30). I was working earlier this week on the sermon I was planning to preach this Sunday from Acts 25 and, ironically, the theme of the sermon was how **God works in mysterious ways**, ways we may never fully comprehend until we see Him in heaven, face-to-face, when all things will become crystal clear. But until that day, lots of things in this life will continue to seem very mysterious, cloudy, even confusing at times. "How in the world could God work good through *that*?!" But that's just because we are very small, finite creatures, viewing all things from a very limited perspective. Even as Christians, we still just "see in a mirror dimly...and know in part" (1 Cor 13:12). We cannot see all things as God does, from an eternal perspective, seeing the end from the beginning. And we just have to trust that, in all things, even coronaviruses that send the world into a frenzied panic, that God is still King, still on the throne, still in control, and working through all things, maybe in very *mysterious* ways, and yet in very *amazing* ways, to fulfill His good purposes in this world.

Having said that, I realize these are crazy days. Who would have thought a month ago that our entire country would be on almost total lockdown?! These are uncertain times, for sure. If you are not convinced of that, just try to buy some toilet paper. Wow! And in these crazy days, as lead pastor of our church, I just wanted to communicate a few thoughts. As I was praying this morning, **four words** were coming to my mind. It seemed the Lord was maybe impressing them on me for our entire church, just a few simple encouragements and/or directions for us during these days. Let me share them with you, and I'll then end with just a couple logistical things as we look forward as a church.

The four words are:

Love. It's tough in times like this to know exactly how to act as Christians. Do we continue to have services and/or meet in large groups even though our country is discouraging that? Do we meet with our Life Groups? Do we keep reaching out to neighbors? Or do we buy up all the toilet paper and run for the hills? And it's important for us, in situations like this, to remember that we should always be governed and directed by love. When we're not certain of what to do or how to act, we can simply aim to love God and our neighbors to the best of our abilities (Mt 22:36-40). And that can look very different at times, depending on the situation. So what does love of God and neighbor look like now? Well, for starters, it probably means avoiding larger group gatherings, for a time. One infected person in a *smaller* gathering might infect just one or two people, but in a *larger* gathering maybe twenty people, spreading a virus exponentially. And even though you might not be concerned *yourself* about getting the virus, because you're young or healthy, you can still spread it to people who are more susceptible. So loving our neighbors now probably means we avoid larger group gatherings. It also probably means that, when we are gathered in smaller groups, or just meeting with one friend, we take care of the simple basics, like washing our hands, covering our coughs and sneezes, and etc, not just so we stay healthy, but so our friends do, as well. And then, let's just make sure we're still reaching out at this time to one another and our neighbors. Because love doesn't hide in times like this. Love enters in and pursues. And our country and our world now need Christians to enter in and pursue, in love, in appropriate ways. So let's aim as a church now to be governed by love. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 Jn 4:11).

Pray. It's ironic how God works. We tend to think God does His best work in this world or in our lives during times of peace, prosperity, safety, and comfort. But that's not typically the way God works. God often does His best and most *powerful* work in times of uncertainty, unrest, poverty, discomfort, sickness, and even death. If you read through the Gospels in the Bible, it's always the people in pain, fear, doubt, poverty, sickness, and so on who come looking for Jesus and are willing to press through the barriers to *get* to Jesus. So when it comes to our world's *eternal* good? Some of the *worst* things can be comfort, security, certainty, prosperity, health, and etc. So what does that mean during this time now, with a coronavirus causing our world and country to go crazy? It means that many of the people in our world, our country, are right now much riper than they've been in years...to come to Christ. So let's set our hearts right now, as a church, to pray. Pray for health, sure. Pray for the health of your family, friends, etc. Just please don't stop there. Let's think bigger than just our health in this little finite life. Let's think eternally. We can be *confident* that God is working right now through this uncertainty, fear, discomfort, sickness, and even death to bring people to His Son in faith. So let's line up with what God is doing right now and pray for the *eternal* good of our fearful, panicked country, families, friends, and loved ones.

Trust. Times of uncertainty can stir up fear in the human heart. You can hear that fear all over the news right now. You can see the fear in the empty toilet paper shelves. Maybe you're feeling a little extra fear yourself right now, for the health of your family, for your finances, or maybe for your favorite politician. "Oh no! What will this mean for the November elections?!" Fear is a very human emotion. God understands that we are fearful at times. And...God calls us to trust Him, *always*. "Trust in the *Lord* with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding" (Prov 3:5). So let's aim to trust in God right now, who loves us dearly in and through Christ. And let's be very careful, as a church, that we don't follow the rest of the world and start trusting in other things. "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God" (Ps 20:7). So let's not trust in our hand washing, though we wash our hands. Let's not trust in the stock market, though we may talk with our financial advisor. Let's not trust in our favorite politician, though we may pray for him or her. Let's do what we need to do during these times. And...let's trust in God. Or, as they said in Revolutionary War days: "Trust the Lord, and keep your gunpowder dry." For it is the Lord who ultimately watches over, leads, protects, and keeps His people alive. So may we live, at this time, in childlike trust in our really good God. And just remember that *nothing* can ever happen to you apart from His eternally good and sovereign will.

Be. The Lord knows how to slow people down. And this has *definitely* slowed our country down. No sports. No school. No kids' activities. No large gatherings. No reason to run to the store for toilet paper. But rather than bemoaning the fact that there's not as much to do and trying to find alternate ways to fill our lives with busyness, let's just embrace it! This is what our good and kind Heavenly Father has providentially allotted for us right now. So let's not fight *against* it, but lean *into* it, which could be a really good thing for our entire church! Because the reality is that we could *all* probably slow down a little, and probably a *lot!* So during this time when God has *forced* us to slow down, let's just do it. Contrary to popular belief, God did not create us to be human *doings*, but human *beings*. So let's practice just BEING for a while. Just BE with your family or small groups of friends or neighbors - talk, play games, engage. Just BE in your quiet home - read, rest, revive. Just BE...with...God. And let's aim during this time to be fully present, truly present, with both God and others. We're so used to being busy all the time - do, do, do - that even when we're with God and others, we're often not really *with* God and others. So let's aim to be there, truly be there, with God and others, during these crazy times. And when things calm down and we start *doing* a little bit more, maybe we will have learned how to be a little more present, our *doing* flowing out of our *being*. Don't fight the coronavirus slow-down. Let's embrace it, by the grace of God. "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps 46:10).

So those are the four words it seemed God was impressing upon my heart this morning. Let's aim as a church now to Love, Pray, Trust, and Be. And just know that God is now working through all things, even this crazy coronavirus, for His glory and the eternal joy of His people.

And now for a few practical logistics. I would imagine that our weekly rhythms as a church will probably need to be a little different for more than just a week or so. It seems that the coronavirus impact will probably *increase* in our country over the next couple of weeks before leveling off and then declining. All of that is in the Lord's hands, obviously, but that's the most likely course. So we will probably need to do things a little differently as a church over the next 3-4 weeks. The CRC elders will continue to pray and discuss things over the coming days, and everything I will now mention is subject to change, but here are just a few things we might expect and/or aim to do, at least for the foreseeable future:

Sunday Service. We anticipate that we will not have access to our East Ridge facility for the next few weeks. So we are talking about doing something online, starting next Sunday most likely. We are now looking into live-feed options. But let me manage your expectations. It might just be me or one of the other pastors, giving a simple message or something like that. But it will at least be an opportunity for us to stay somewhat unified as a church. If we do, indeed, do something online, we would encourage our entire church to try to take part in that, either just watching at home as a family or with your Life Group.

Life Groups. The word on the street right now is that smaller gatherings are okay, as long as everyone is just careful (washing hands, covering coughs, etc). So we encourage our Life Groups to continue to meet as appropriate. This will be the primary place now where we can all get the fellowship we need as believers. If you know of other people in our church who are not yet connected to a Life Group, you might want to consider inviting them to join you. Just keep the group numbers down, as much as possible. If your Life Group is already really large, as some of ours are, you might even want to break your group up into a couple smaller group gatherings for just a few weeks.

Youth Group. The elders have decided to cancel this week's meeting and then reassess for future meetings. Just look for future communications.

Financial Giving. Just a quick note on finances. If we can't meet as a church for several Sundays, this will probably impact our church giving, since we will not be able to pass the baskets on Sunday morning. It shouldn't be a huge impact, since most of our giving is now online. But please just be cognizant of that and, if you typically give on Sunday mornings, maybe just make an effort to give online or hold it for a future service. That would help us.

That's it for now, I think. We will try to communicate regularly by email, especially since things are pretty fluid right now, changing frequently. Let's continue to rally together as a church. Let's aim to be patient, prayerful, and ready to flex with things as needed. The Lord is good. He is sovereign. And He loves His people dearly! May God be glorified in us now as a church family, and may we come out of this even stronger. I look forward to seeing you soon.

Much grace in Christ,

Pastor Brett