



December 1, 2020

To the saints of Central Kitsap Presbyterian Church:

Over the last two weeks, since Session voted for a hiatus of in-person worship, I've received many comments and emails from individuals in our church who are all over the spectrum on this question. Some have expressed to me that they feel their particular side is not being heard or considered. Believe it or not, there are folks on the other side who feel the exact same way. The arguments are complex, and if we fail to see that, we haven't actually taken the time to hear out the other side of argument fairly. Some have said, "Those who are afraid or high risk can stay home, but the rest of us should have the option to meet." But that's not why many are staying home. For many, there's no fear for them personally, but they believe the church should not set itself above or apart from what the community is doing, but rather in service to it, underneath it, sacrificing for it, and if everyone else is staying home, the church should, too, in solidarity with our community. On the other hand, some have said, "Those who want to meet in person don't care about others' safety." But that's not why many want to open up. They're concerned about what I called in my last letter "nonviral pandemics": abuse in the home, addiction, depression, suicide rates. Both sides, at their best, are motivated by earnest love.

I smiled on our Zoom call tonight when I looked up and saw the strained and pained expressions of many of our elders. I imagine that's how my face has looked a lot the past few weeks. Many of our elders shared with me how much time they spent in prayer this past week. These questions are complex and the way forward is not easy.

Session voted, two weeks ago, to take a two-week hiatus from in person worship because of the music question. Specifically: how do we continue to provide a meaningful, quality experience through music for the majority of the congregation which continues to worship *online*, while at the same time offering in person worship in a manner that is safe *and* a witness to our community that we are in solidarity with them in the effort of staying home? Tonight, Session voted to open our doors for worship once again, with prerecorded music and no congregational singing permitted. For those who choose to worship in person with us, you can mouth the words, hear them sung over you and let them steep in your soul, or pray them. But if you'd like to sing out for all to hear, it will need to be in your own living room for just your family, cats and dogs to hear. Because this decision comes midweek, our RSVP system will be live *until Friday*. You *must* RSVP to attend in person.

I'll give you a possible preview of this Sunday's sermon... or maybe it will be cut for time and I'll be glad I used it here. Peter was writing a letter to a persecuted church. As we might well imagine, there was temptation to be hateful or bitter towards their persecutors. Here comes this great verse toward the end of the letter: "Be clearheaded. Keep alert. Your accuser, the devil, is on the prowl like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Remember who your enemy is, Peter is saying. It isn't your persecutors. And for us, it isn't our opponents or those who see and feel things differently. It's the one who prowls around seeking to divide and destroy Christ's church. We are One Church with great diversity. Thanks be to God for that, even though it sometimes makes things really difficult. There are people who see things differently. But they're not your enemy. They are your brothers and sisters in Christ, children of our Heavenly Father. And Sunday, wherever we are, we will worship Him together.

Pastor Tyler