

18 March 2020

Dear Brothers & Sisters

One of the things that has been evident in light of recent events is that for many people in our world today **fear** is dominating their lives! Fear of a virus, fear of financial impact, fear of travel, fear of interaction with others, and fear of an unknown future. Sometimes it's an irrational fear, such as the fear of running out of toilet paper despite the manufacturing companies producing the rolls at full capacity:

As we respond to the challenges we're currently facing, let us not forget that those of us who trust in Christ **need not fear** anything, but would do well to instead remind ourselves, as we continue gathering together, of the bigger picture:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

*"For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Romans 8:35-39 NIV)

Not even COVID-19 will remove us from God's love through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Because of this, we suggest that our response to the current crisis should be shaped by three practices: **Think, Love, Thank**.

1. **Think**

Fear and panic are the enemies of clear-thinking. They are fueled by adrenaline, the fight-or-flight response, the instinct for self-preservation. In contrast, the gospel of Jesus leads us to think, rather than give in to mindless reactivity. Grace leads us away from being ruled by our 'passions' and towards self-controlled, godly conduct.

2. **Love**

Just as fear is the enemy of clear thinking, it is also the enemy of love. Panicked self-preservation is blind to the needs of others; it just grabs stuff. But once you are thinking straight you can look to the needs of your neighbours. Often this will involve giving up our own desires for the sake of others' well-being. But that's exactly what Jesus did for us, and to a far greater extent!

3. **Thank**

The gospel gives us endless reasons to be thankful. We should regularly thank God for all that he has done for us in Christ, especially for his salvation. We should also regularly thank God for the good things we have in life more broadly. This is particularly important when times are difficult. God is good to us daily in ways that we so often take for granted.

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And so, with this in mind, and based on current information and advice, including decisions made for us by higher authorities, please note we are taking the following actions:

1. The 8.30am, 10.15am and 6.30pm public Sunday church services are cancelled until further notice, in line with the rest of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney,
2. The AGM is postponed to a date to be determined, and
3. Mission Week with the team from Moore Theological College is cancelled, as is the annual Lord's Supper Dinner leading up to Easter.

However,

4. A combined church service will be **live-streamed at 10.00am this Sunday**, and every Sunday for the foreseeable future (information about how to join the live stream will be forwarded to church members before the weekend),
5. **Arny's youth** group members are invited to meet outdoors on-site this Friday, for a special information night, starting at 7.00pm and finishing at 8.30pm, including a games/social/Bible input program, and
6. **Homegroups are on as normal** and have now become more important for our church members than ever before. As we gather in small private fellowship groups during this unprecedented period it is prudent to greet one another without handshakes, hugs, kisses or any physical contact. Practicing appropriate social distancing within our homes and keeping the weekly gatherings under two hours in length is strongly encouraged.

What should you do if you are feeling unwell or have recently returned from overseas? Follow the advice of the governmental authorities and stay at home. Should you require any practical, emotional or spiritual assistance, please do not hesitate to contact your homegroup leader or any member of the ministry staff.

The Lord's people have always gathered around the Word, devoted to prayer, and that won't change. However, during this period, we will need to adapt and use the good gifts of technology and old-fashioned means of communication (such as the telephone) to ensure everyone will be cared for in this time.

We anticipate writing to you again, with more information about how we will "do" church for the next few months, before the weekend.

May the Lord guide and direct all our decisions and actions,

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