

✠ FAIRFAX BAPTIST CHURCH ✠

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COVID-19.

For many, the virus sparks immense fear. Others will call it a government-concocted scheme (if not hoax). Regardless of what you may personally believe about the situation, this is what I know. People with far more knowledge and background at dealing with health-related matters than I have are recommending that groups of more than 10 not meet together. This number is down from 50 just a few days ago. And frankly, the number could change to 5 or 2 (apart from immediate families) within days.

And so, we must consider the implications.

As such, Fairfax Baptist Church is cancelling all services and meetings for two weeks (through 04/02/2020) at which time we will re-evaluate the decision. While it is likely that this virus will still be a major news story in two weeks, cancelling for two weeks at a time seems a reasonable response and allows us to resume meeting more quickly, should the situation change.

This decision was not made lightly and it was not made alone. You may recall that on Sunday, I made the statement that hospitals do not close for the physically sick, and people will need a place to turn if they are spiritually ill. Of course, the church is not a place, it is a people, but as people, we are meant to meet together, we are called to meet together. And that happens in a place, which can allow others to join us in that time of meeting.

However, I also said that should circumstances change, a re-evaluation must take place. While Missouri has had only a few cases so far, the state is now requesting that groups of 10 or more cease to meet. Of course, some exceptions are being made for religious gatherings, but after the statement put out by our county yesterday, along with the request of Dr. Burke, that re-evaluation has now been finalized.

Again, this decision was not made quickly, and it was not made lightly. In fact, it is with a very heavy heart that I announce this decision. But just because my heart is heavy does not mean that it is not the right decision to make. The circumstances around us are extraordinary, and extraordinarily unique. I have researched how the church has responded in the past to situations like the plague, but one major difference now is that we now understand germ theory, and how germs are transferred from person to person. That knowledge must be considered.

Fear is real, but it need not rule. I also made that statement Sunday, and I reiterate that truth today. This decision is not about fear ruling. It is simply being prudent. My primary responsibility as shepherd is to protect the flock. First and foremost, that protection is spiritual, but the physical must be considered. While I am not concerned about my own exposure, I am concerned about passing on any virus to those who need counsel and comfort at this time. How that counsel and comfort takes place may also have to be adjusted, and I am still considering how best to do that during this time.

I do plan to continue to preach a message each week. The message will be recorded from the pulpit (to provide some semblance of normalcy for those watching/listening), and then published for anyone to watch later. The video will be posted to Facebook (facebook.com/fairfaxmobaptistchurch) for viewing by 10:30 am on Sunday morning for each of the next two weeks, and longer if the situation requires it. We are prerecording for two reasons. First, by not doing a live feed, there should be fewer technical and network issues, especially if many churches are doing live feeds on Facebook around the same time. Second, not everyone has Facebook, but if they have a computer or a cell phone, they can access the video via the church's YouTube page (youtube.com and search for Fairfax Baptist Church, Fairfax, MO for our channel). The audio for the sermon will be on the "Listen" page of the website (fairfaxbaptistchurch.org/listen.html) and Andy's sermon notes will be posted on the church blog (fairfaxbaptistchurch.org/blog) by midweek as usual.

I realize that this entire situation is frustrating to many people. We are experiencing uncertainty at a level that most have never known. I also know that cancelling services may frustrate some reading this. I understand. Again, my heart is heavy in making this announcement. But, again, it is the right thing to do at this time. A pastor friend of mine made this comment to his church which represents my sentiment well:

"If I must go to jail, I want it to be for the violation of preaching the gospel, not for violating a health-ordered mandate. Peter and John were forbidden to speak or teach in the name of Jesus in Acts 4 and 5. They violated that mandate. They were arrested and beaten and released. In Romans 13, the Apostle Paul commands us to be subject to the governing authorities."

- Scott Flippin

The governing authorities at the federal and state level make their decisions on what they believe is best for the nation. I do not ignore that. But the statements made by our county officials, and our local physician, are made for what they believe is best for us: the fellow citizens of Atchison County, Missouri. I take more stock in that. And, again, their request is right, for this place at this time.

I realize that many have a great deal of fear and others will have questions. So, for the next two Wednesday evenings, until a meeting is held to determine the next, or continued, course of action, we will still have a chance to meet – via Facebook live on the church's page. I do not have an agenda for the live meeting other than to answer questions and to be a presence for the church. I do not believe that being online replaces the need to meet together, but the internet does provide an alternative in this extraordinary circumstance.

I will begin the live feed at 6:30 pm and be available until 7:30 pm. I am also considering how to communicate other options for study and even community during this time of social distancing.

In closing, this situation presents a fantastic opportunity to spend time with those you love and hold dear. It is a time to get a few projects done that you have put off due to busyness elsewhere. And it is a great time to spend some time with God. We know what the news will be for the next couple of months (we can look to China for an idea of where we will be – China is starting to recover!). And without sports, restaurants, and other entertainment and educational venues available, consider how to use that time to do those things you long to do rather than be drawn into simply watching the updates of the virus all day.

I sign off this message as I do my personal correspondence because it is as true today, and will be for every tomorrow, as it has been for the last 2000 years – Because He Lives!

Because He Lives,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Andy Braams".

Andy

Psalm 73.25-26

Colossians 1.28-29

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