



Pastor Aaron M. Filipek
Phone (701) 678-2401

Zion Lutheran Church, LCMS
420 1st Street SE, PO Box 118
Gwinner, ND 58040

March 19, 2020

Blessed Saints of Zion,

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:4-7)

It seems hard to rejoice at a time like this. Every day it seems the news changes and more and more uncertainty sets in. We aren't exactly sure what to think, say, or do. Guidelines for gathering in groups have changed from 250 to 50 to 10. It certainly seems like anxiousness, worry, and fear are easier than rejoicing. We can rejoice only because we have Jesus! He and He alone will guard our hearts and minds, and give us peace.

With everything going on right now, what does this mean for the saints at Zion? The following difficult decision has been made. It is with great sadness and with much consternation and regret that the leadership of Zion, along with Pastor Filipek, have elected to cancel all public services at Zion. All other activities are also cancelled for this brief period of time. This is effective until April 2, due to COVID-19 and the threat to our people, many of whom are already fragile. We will reassess on April 1st, and if the Lord wills, perhaps we can get together again in time for Palm Sunday, though of course there's no guarantee.

In the meantime, I am reminded of Jesus' words in Matthew 18:20: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I." Just because our church is not gathering in large numbers, doesn't mean that we don't need Jesus now, more than ever. "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." We can still march on in the name of Jesus. Our church is not shut down. Here are a few thoughts.

- **Facebook Live** I will still lead our Wednesday night Lent services (**6:30 pm**) and our Sunday morning services (**10:00 am**) live on Facebook. You can download the bulletin from our website (**ziongwinner.org**) and follow along. Bulletins will also be printed and on a table in the narthex if you would like to stop by and pick one up.
- **Offerings** I know times might be getting tough financially for some of us, if not all of us. The church still has bills, utilities, salaries, and a budget to keep going. Please keep giving an offering. It might be easy to overlook, but it is important.
 - **Mail it to the church.**
 - **Drop it by the church if you are out around town buying groceries etc.**
 - **Online giving** (If you need help doing this, you can follow directions in the bulletin or call Tana at the church office).

- **Parishioner needs** Do you need groceries delivered? Medications picked up? Are you financially struggling? Please let me know so I can coordinate help for you.
- **Daily Prayers** Please use your **Newsletters** daily. Every month I include the Congregation at Prayer. It gives you a devotion to follow with included Bible Readings, Catechism Readings, and Prayer. Let us gather around God's Word. Let us also remember one another, our community, country, leaders, medical professionals, teachers, pastors, the sick, etc. in our prayers.
- **Pastoral Care** I am not at this time able to enter hospitals and nursing homes. I will be calling our shut-ins. If you are in the hospital, please let me know.
- **Be the Body of Christ** I encourage you to call, text, write, or email one another. Encourage each other. The elders of Zion and I are going to try our best to call and check in on people.
- **Resources** Tana and I are working on a list of resources for you to use at this time. We will send these out to you at a later time. If you would like to borrow a hymnal or theological book let Pastor Filipek know.
- **Confirmation** I am working on how to best catechize our confirmands and will let parents and students know in the next few days.
- **Word & Sacrament** I am going to be cautious for the benefit of my neighbor. However, I am going to be at church during regular hours. **If you want to stop in for prayer, Holy Communion, counseling, confession, go through an order of service with me, or just chat, I am here.** Just as we can go grocery shopping, check our mail, pick up packets from the school, drive through at the bank, etc. so you can stop by church. We will have hand sanitizer set up as you come in. The church will be clean and wiped down so you can pick up a bulletin in person, leave an offering, etc. We can still practice social distancing in a clean environment.
- **Stay home** If you are sick, recovering from a sickness, have low immunity, are at high risk, or just don't want to get out, DON'T!
STAY HOME!
- **Christian Love** I know that many decisions are being made in many aspects of our lives. People are trying their best who have to make decisions. Be patient with others, forgive others, speak well of others, even in your opinion differs with the choices being made.

These are a few thoughts at this time. There are probably many more I have missed, but I wanted to communicate these at this time.

Most importantly, above all else, remember the Gospel! Jesus died for you. Jesus guards, keeps, and protects your hearts and minds. Rejoice! Don't be anxious. Jesus died for you. Jesus rose for you. He promises you forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. Jesus said, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (St. Luke 12:32). So, fear not. Rejoice! Do not worry. Rejoice! Do not be anxious. Rejoice! Our Lord Jesus, has not and will not leave nor forsake you, His flock, for our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. The Lord be with you all!

Christ's Peace,

Pastor Aaron M. Filipek