

Hope Goodells

22 May 2020

To our Family of Hope Goodells:

Grace, peace, and mercy from God our Father and our Lord and savior Jesus Christ! We at Hope Lutheran Church, Goodells, Michigan, have monitored the development of the Coronavirus in our community and taken this plague very seriously. We have been mindful of the health and welfare of our brothers and sisters and their families and neighbors in early adoption of safe-worship conduct prior to the Stay-at-Home order in Michigan. We look at the text of Matthew 22:37-40:

"Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind' (Deuteronomy 6:5). This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (Leviticus 19:18) All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

With this love of God and one another in mind, our approach is but one example to obey the Law to the best of our ability, in particular Exodus 20:13 "You shall not murder."

The spirit of this law in light of all Scripture is best summarized by Martin Luther's Small Catechism in regards to respecting (or Biblically speaking, fearing) God and loving God and through the Fifth Commandment, "'You shall not murder.' *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need." Since 29 March 2020, it was out of this love that we chose to remain online-only for these many weeks. We have continued to worship online-only despite the Stay-at-Home order rescinding restrictions when it comes to worship to keep everyone safe.

It is in this same mindset that we look at the process of resuming in-person worship: we do so out of love of God and neighbor. We do not assume what the will of God is in allowing this pandemic to befall the world but we place our trust in Him and Him alone. We do not boast that we or Jesus is bigger than the virus as we do not know how God choosing to act through this pandemic. We can only continue to pray—as we recall the Lord's prayer—that *His will be done* and that this pandemic bring God's creation closer to Him and that he protects his people.

God in Christ Jesus is all about gathering His scattered peoples that have sinned and drifted away from Him so that they may receive that forgiveness of sins and have a renewed, loving relationship with God through his Son. It is why we must worship Him as this message of forgiveness and love God has for us keeps us and strengthens our faith. Through Jesus, the Word, we receive his absolution of sins and are spiritually renewed in our baptism by the hearing of His word and receiving His sacraments. Here again we look at what Martin Luther has to say in regards to partaking in the Sacraments as found in the Small Catechism's preface:

Here... urging [to go the Sacraments] is necessary, however, with the understanding that we are not to force anyone into the faith or to the Sacrament, nor set any law, time, or place for it. Our preaching should instead be such that of their own accord and without our command, people feel constrained themselves and press us pastors to serve the Sacrament. The way to go about this is to tell them that if anyone does not seek or desire the Lord's Supper at the very least four times a year, it is to be feared that he despises the Sacrament and is not Christian,



just as no one is a Christian who does not believe or hear the Gospel. For Christ did not say, "Omit this" or "despise this," but "This do, as often as you drink it," etc. He most certainly wants it done and does not want it left undone and despised. "This do," He says.

The number of times receiving Holy Communion is arbitrary but the spirit of what Luther speaks is true, 1 Corinthians 11:25 ESV, "In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'" We should desire to worship and partake in Holy Communion as often as possible, in remembrance of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins and to spiritually refresh us and keep us close to God. John 6:53, "Jesus said to them, 'Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.'"

We therefore at Hope Lutheran Church seek to resume in-person worship but will, out of care for our brothers and sisters, do so in a manner still conscious to health and safety. We will also endeavor to continue posting services online so that the message Christ may continue to go out beyond our walls. In that way, those that still wish to stay away may continue to worship virtually and still receive the word. We ask everyone to pray as we seek God's guidance and protection by looking to continue in-person worship of Him in spirit and truth and to share His Gospel message with our neighbor; this we will do out of the love that God has shown us and us responding in the same loving manner. This pandemic will Passover, but God's word will endure forever.

In Jesus' name, Amen.



Mr. William Warsinski

Deacon, LLD

P.S. // Having met via video conference 22 May 2020 and voted in favor of reopening on 31 May 2020, details on the safety precautions Hope Lutheran Church will take to reopen safely will be made available at www.hopegoodells-lcms.org and on www.facebook.com/hopegoodells.

