



Central Lutheran MINNEAPOLIS

March 25, 2021

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

We are counting down to the return to in-person worship and the new normal that awaits us all. We are hopeful for a return to in-person worship this summer. So, for a second time we will gather online or via Facebook Live for worship this Holy Week and Easter Sunday. I do not know about you, but I am tired of saying, “who could have imagined.”

The Congregation Council met on Tuesday, March 23. They affirmed that our next evaluation date will be June 1, 2021. Until then we will continue with online and Facebook Live worship and with the other restrictions that are in place. Yet, this is a different date than all the previous dates we set for evaluation. This is most likely the date that will signal the change to open up and return to in-person worship. If the vaccinate rates continue to climb, there is confidence that we will return to in-person worship in July.

Why is this the next evaluation date? It seems so far away and are not other churches starting limited, in-person worship? These are good questions. The decision is grounded in two guiding principles. First, it is grounded in our welcome statement: “You are welcome. No exceptions.” Living into that welcome statement, we want to be able to say that you are welcome, fully welcome, with no limits on numbers. We also want to extend the welcome when all have access to the vaccination. We suspended worship to protect the vulnerable; now we wait for a full return until all have access to the vaccine.

Second, the decision is grounded in the recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) guidelines, federal OSHA standards related to Covid-19 and Governor Walz’s direction for occupancy. In addition, we rely on the external guidance of people like Dr. Mike Osterholm and synod leaders. While some of these sources have lifted restrictions for houses of worship, others still caution that we are not quite ready for larger gatherings until the vaccine rate reaches 60-70% of the population.

Last year on Palm Sunday, Mark Sedio's introduction helped ground us. I believe it still speaks to each of us, one year later: "We enter Holy Week and encounter the paradox that defines our faith: Jesus Christ is both glorified king and humiliated servant. Over the course of this week's readings and services we discover that we too are full of paradox, waving palm branches in celebration as Christ comes into our midst, then walking the path that leads to death on a cross. This year we encourage you to participate, worshiping online as we follow Christ into Jerusalem, participate in humble acts of loving service (Maundy Thursday), listen to the Passion story (Good Friday), then recall God's saving acts throughout history affirming that, through baptism we participate in Jesus' death and glorious resurrection (Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday)."

You are invited to worship at each of these services. The links are all available on the website and will be included with the email devotionals this Holy Week.

- **Maundy Thursday, April 1:** 7:00 p.m. online or Facebook Live worship
- **Good Friday, April 2:** 12:00 p.m. online or Facebook Live worship; 7:00 p.m. re-posting of the 12:00 p.m. service
- **Holy Saturday Easter Vigil, April 3:** 5:00 p.m. online or Facebook Live worship
- **Easter Sunday, April 4:** 8:30 and 10:30 a.m. online or Facebook Live worship

I am restless, ready to return to the fullness of life together as Central Lutheran. Yet, I seek patience, grounded in the wisdom of our expansive welcome statement and the science that still asks for caution and a more measured plan to reopen. Maybe you are in this paradox, as well. In all the paradoxes of life we can remember that we are held by a God who loves, restores and guides us.

It is a privilege to serve as one of your rostered leaders. May God bless you. "See" you in worship as we gather online or via Facebook Live.

Yours in Christ Jesus,



Pastor Peter