

The Blessing of the Assembled Church

This week the Elders of our church decided that in light of government recommendations we should cancel our Sunday morning Worship service. I think it was the right thing to do in light of the circumstances. But the decision is a very painful one for me. I love gathering together on the Lord's Day to fellowship and worship with my church family. It is also something that we are commanded to do in Scripture.

The fourth commandment says that we are to keep the Sabbath day holy. One of the most important aspects of obeying that commandment is gathering with our church family to worship. In the New Testament we are told in Hebrews 10:24-25, to "let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near." So believers gather for worship on Sunday's out of love and obedience to God. We also gather for worship to encourage one another in our faith.

Every person who has ever existed has been wired by God to worship. Everybody worships something. There are no exceptions to that. But by God's grace, the Lord has transformed the hearts of believers to delight in worshipping Him. Certainly we worship the Lord personally. We worship the Lord in many ways throughout the week. But there is something special about worshipping the Lord together with fellow believers. I enjoy hearing and singing along with Matt Boswell on Come Behold The Wondrous Mystery in my van. But it simply can't compare to singing with my brothers and sisters in Christ ... "In the stead of ruined sinners hangs the Lamb in victory!" It is also a helpful thing to be able to share prayer requests by email. But that simply can't compare with praying out loud for one another in your small group. God calls us to "give thanks to the Lord with all our heart, in the company of the upright and in the assembly." (Psalm 111:1).

We are also called to gather for worship to encourage one another in our faith. There are times that Facebook memes are helpful and encouraging. I have watched movies that are quite challenging to me. But that is nothing compared to the encouragement that happens when believers gather with their church family for worship. The New Testament compares the local church with the human body. We definitely need arms, legs, fingers, toes, eyes and ears. They all work together for a healthy body. In a similar way, as believers we need personal contact with one another. On a typical Sunday morning people are greeting one another; caring for one another as they listen to what has been happening in the recent week; bearing one another's burdens as they talk about personal challenges; hearing and interacting with biblical teaching; admonishing someone who needs to be encouraged to press on; rejoicing with good news; weeping with those who have suffered a painful loss—and much, much more.

Watching a live stream worship service is no substitute for the blessing God gives when His church assembles together. Sometimes it is the best option we have. But it cannot compare with congregational worship and fellowship with believers we love in Christ. It is painful to cancel our Sunday worship service—and it should be painful. May the Lord use the times that we simply have to miss corporate worship with our church family to cause us to further appreciate what a wonderful blessing it truly is.