

ON MASKS AND SINGING

5/28/20

Hello Calvary –

Some of the content in this email may not be of great interest to you – and if that is the case I would ask you to skip down to the section I have below about wearing masks at church and at least read that. Thank you for your time.

So, yes, a good many of you may not care much about this but I feel an obligation to continue to explain the positions I have taken personally as the church board has tried to navigate the last couple weeks of government orders about church services.

It was just a week ago that I communicated to you my strong belief that we should abide by the Governor's order to not begin meeting yet in church. My argument was that his order was not intended to attack the practice of our faith but was, instead, intended to help prevent sickness and death. My position was that for a short time we could and should abide by his order. 1 Peter 2:13 - - "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority..."

And so some of you may have wondered why, this week, I have supported a return to church where we will sing together. See this paragraph from the current guidance for worship services put out by the Minnesota Department of Health (*I'm calling this "Directive B"... directive A will come later*):

"Singing is a higher-risk activity as it more forcefully expels respiratory droplets than speaking. And the act of singing may contribute to transmission of COVID-19, possibly through emission of aerosols. **Congregations should refrain from singing**. Congregations are strongly encouraged to offer pre-recorded music or only one cantor singing at a distance of at least 12 feet from anyone else during the service, while wearing a face mask."

So, here we have another well-intended order from the MDH / Governor that has as its goal preventing sickness and death. *Why am I disregarding this one – when I strongly advocated to follow the other one?*

I bring into evidence before you now (haha!) "**Directive A**" from our Governor's order over the weekend (Executive Order 20-56) allowing church services to resume at 25% capacity:

"On May 22, 2020, the CDC noted that, for many, worship is an essential part of life. Our faith communities tend to many Minnesotans' mental and spiritual health and therefore play a special role in our society. In addition, worship services, weddings, and funerals offer a more predictable and controllable environment than other social settings in which people may gather. In many cases, faith communities are aware of and can monitor attendees at services and ceremonies and take appropriate actions in the event of illness. Recognizing the unique and

essential role that faith communities play in our society, the CDC revised its guidelines related to communities of faith. The CDC also reiterated the unfortunate truth that gatherings present a risk for increasing the spread of COVID-19. Nonetheless, to ensure the mental and spiritual health of Minnesotans, while continuing to protect the public health, it is necessary to take another step to allow for weddings, funerals, and services to continue with larger groups.”

Directive A allows “worship services” to resume. The goal of Directive A is to “ensure the mental and spiritual health of Minnesotans”.

Directive A asks us to go ahead (if we choose to) and have worship services. Directive B asks us not to sing at those worship services.

It is my feeling that these two directives are not compatible with each other and that they likely were written by people who, perhaps, have not experienced or valued properly the worship experience that we value and practice at Calvary regularly.

I would say that a church service **IS** three things – and all three elements are vital.

A worship service IS: a time to connect spiritually to God through singing and prayer, a time to hear the Word of God preached (learning God’s instructions and how to apply them to our lives), and finally, a worship service is a time to be with our Christian brothers and sisters and to experience these things together.

There is something about song and singing that allows a connection between our spirits and God’s Spirit in a very special way. I don’t understand it – but I know it’s true. Singing is part of the definition, in my opinion, of what a worship service is.

Therefore, I believe that Directive A and Directive B are contradictory. It is akin to saying “Have a worship service but don’t worship.”

Since I see these as contradictory instructions I believe it is best to look at the intent of the main directive – Directive A - and seek to “tend to Minnesotans’ mental and spiritual health” through the resumption of conducting worship services at Calvary... that include singing. The church board was in agreement with this at our meeting on Tuesday.

I take obeying the government seriously. I think you know that by now.

An order from the Governor that said “don’t meet” was black and white and I believed we should obey that.

An order that says “worship but don’t worship” takes a little navigating and I have sought to make the best choice out of the options that presented to us.

OK – that’s singing.

Now onto the **WEARING OF MASKS IN CHURCH.**

Included in it's instructions for houses of worship the MDH states this: "Strongly encourage all participants to wear a face covering or mask when they are able."

Here I believe we are back into the zone of needing to "submit to the authorities" both as a church and as individuals. I would ask that each of you bring a mask when you come to church and wear it at least while you are interacting with people and while you are singing. Perhaps the mask can be pulled down under your chin while listening to the sermon.

I understand that there are many opinions out there about mask wearing and whether they do any good. But the fact remains that, at this time, the health professionals in our state – the people who have the JOB of researching these things and guiding public health – believe that masks will help limit the spread of the Coronavirus and they have asked us to wear them at church.

I think we should submit to this request.

There is no harm done to us in wearing a mask in church. As far as I can tell the only reasons not to wear them are because they are annoying to wear (which they are) and because we don't like being told what to do. I don't think those reasons are sufficient to warrant defiance in this case.

Therefore we are "strongly encouraging" you to wear a mask when you come to church. AND, in an effort to heed the health professional's warnings about singing – even though we still plan to sing – we are going to "require" that you wear a mask while singing.

Now, if you are dead set against wearing a mask and I haven't convinced you to change your mind here (haha!) then notice that there still is a pathway for you: you can attend...just don't sing. Worship in your hearts while those around you are singing – but don't sing.

I hope this all makes sense.

I really wish church hadn't become so complicated all of a sudden but it has. Let's thank God that we can open our church doors this Sunday and then let's pray that we can get back to the old "normal" soon!

Thanks Calvary. See you soon!

Pastor Eric