

ONLINE Message – March 21, 2020

***You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You”
(NKJV)***

Greetings to you from the Germantown Church of God, in Cascade, MD. I am Mark Hosler, pastor here at Germantown Church of God. I am coming to you today through this video message to share with you information about our Church, and to provide some words of encouragement and challenge from the Bible.

Suspending Services: The leaders of our Church have decided that we will be suspending the Sunday morning Worship gathering for the next few Sundays. We are all aware of the Coronavirus Pandemic that our nation is going through. One of the ways of slowing down the spread of this very serious and very contagious virus is to avoid contact with large numbers of people. We do not know who has been exposed, so it is wise to avoid situations where we might be exposed, or where we might expose someone else. Government authorities, including the governor of Maryland, Larry Hogan has issued a mandate, forbidding large numbers of people from gathering together. We want to respect those who are in authority over us, and we want to do what we can to slow the spread of the disease. If the disease goes unchecked, the already strained health care system in our country would be even more overwhelmed. We want to be good citizens, who are thinking about others before ourselves. **How Long?** We do not know how long this current season of staying out of large groups will last. We cannot say at this point how long Sunday services will be suspended. When those in authority determine that it is once again safe to do so, we will resume our Sunday Worship services.

A New Way of Gathering: Many Churches and organizations are using the technology that is available to us today to hold meetings and services online. We have decided that there are some steps that we can take to provide messages online. We will be recording a video message at least once a week, maybe more often than that, to stay in touch with each other. We will be passing along information, prayer concerns and messages from the Bible. This is a new way of pastoring for me, so I hope you will be patient as I try to provide ministry to you. I am learning as I go. Wayne Buhrman has been helping me to learn and helping with this recording. Thank you to Wayne.

Links to these messages will be available on our Church Facebook page, and on the Church web site. So if you have not yet visited our Facebook page (Germantown Church of God), please do so and click “Like”. And if you have never visited our web site, please do so. www.germantowncog.org. The messages will be saved to the Germantown Church of God You Tube Channel which we have created. When new messages are available I will send emails with links to the message

Please understand that we are suspending public Worship services – We are not closing the Church! Our gatherings will take place “virtually” as you watch these recordings. We want to be in Community without always being in the same room. I want to suggest that this is not the first time in the history of the Church when Christians were in community while not being in the same place. In the New Testament, we find a number of letters written by the Apostle Paul to Churches that he had started. He wrote letters to the Churches in order to continue to provide leadership and ministry to them in times when he was geographically distant from them. If the Internet had been available I expect Paul would have used it to stay connected to his friends and Church Family. .

Message: As a nation, and as the Church we are in a NEW season. We have never been through something like this. I’m sure that when we first started hearing about a new Coronavirus, we never expected that it would result in the changes to our lifestyle that we are now living through. Some of you are able to continue to leave your home and go to your place of employment. But for many, you are “staying at home”. Schools are closed. Businesses are closed. Restaurants are closed. We have been encouraged to “shelter in” and not to gather with large groups of people. Some of you are still able to get out, to go to the grocery stores (although you may not find much there). But many because of concern for their own health and because they do not want to spread any disease to others, are choosing to stay in. This “confinement” is new to us. New emotions are welling up within. Husbands and wives are re-connecting. Parents and children are in a new place. As we go through this season, of course we wonder how long it will last? When will life return to normal? And we do not

know the answer to that. So we are forced to live with a sense of uncertainty. ***I would like to suggest to you that we use this time – no matter how long it lasts – for good!***

In recent weeks, before our Sunday morning services were suspended, we have been talking about Spiritual Maturity, the process of becoming more mature as a Christian. We understand the process of becoming spiritually mature to mean that we are growing in Christlikeness. The more mature we become, the more our lives will resemble Jesus. And the more Christlike we become, the more fruitful, the more productive our lives will be for God. So just because we are not meeting publicly for worship and study, we can still learn and grow and develop Christlike character. Let us commit to coming out of this season better and stronger people. I would like to read some verses from the book of **Hebrews, 10:19-25**.

The writer of this book presents 3 challenges for us in these verses: 1. Verse 22: ***22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings.*** He tells us that Jesus has made it possible for us to be in God's presence. His death on the cross, paid the price for our forgiveness and cleansing and we can come into God's presence, free from guilt and shame. Just because we cannot gather with friends, in a place that is special to us, does not mean we cannot draw near to God. We can do that through prayer and meditation on Scripture. We can learn the spiritual discipline of solitude and silence – finding a place where we can be still in God's presence. (As you enter into a time of solitude and silence, take a few moments to quiet your mind and soul. Then accept the Lord's invitation to be in His presence, and invite Him to speak into your heart).

2. The second challenge the writer offers to us is in verse 23. ***23 Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.*** I use the word season to refer to this time we are going through. Seasons change. This "shut down" is not going to last forever. Let us not become discouraged or depressed. Much about life as we have known it has changed, but it will not last. Remember that God is still the Sovereign ruler of the universe. Coronavirus did not catch God by surprise. He has a plan that is bigger than Coronavirus. And He will accomplish His plan.

3. The third challenge that the writer presents is verse 24: ***And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.*** Now this may be the most difficult of the three challenges, given that we are to not gathering together. But it can be done. ***We must choose to stay connected to each other.*** We can do that through telephone calls, email or social networking. We can pray together over the telephone. If you are still able to be out and about, you may be able to serve someone else by helping them with groceries, a trip to the Post Office. I've been thinking that perhaps in this time, we could be even more connected than when we can gather together. When we come to "Church" we greet one another, shake hands (when it is safe), and then go our separate ways. But maybe during this season, we could do better, we could do much more. Calling and checking in, and praying together over the phone. It may feel AWKWARD, but it will soon become very natural. Push through the awkwardness and go ahead and talk together.

So again, my challenge is that you will use this season as a time for spiritual growth. ***Don't waste the "hardship" of the moment!*** Make some Goals: Read a book of the Bible. Read a book. Write a letter to someone. Send cards, especially to those who are confined in nursing homes. Pray – early and often!

If you would like to talk more about your spiritual journey, please send me an email or private message, and I will follow up with you. God bless you.

Before I conclude this episode, I want to talk about giving. Many of you have made a commitment to support the ministry of our Church financially. You regularly give tithes and offerings to our Church. You have discovered that you are blessed when you give, and it brings you great joy to give. We are grateful for your support. During this time, expenses of the Church will continue. Bills will need to be paid. If you would like to continue your practice of giving regularly to the Church, you can send your gifts by mail to the Church. Those gifts will be processed as they usually are. If you do choose to give, we say Thank You!

Prayer

Benediction – *May the Lord bless you and keep you, May the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you, May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. AMEN.*

Thanks for tuning in today. Come back and join us next week. As we move toward Holy Week and Easter we will have a message about Jesus' journey to the cross. God bless you.