

May 5, 2020

Reflections

What Is Essential?

We've been using the word "essential" a lot during these past two months. We pray for and praise our "essential" workers. We question and debate which businesses and activities are essential. We have learned that "essential" may vary from person to person. While some businesses may be luxuries for their customers, they are essential for their employees. All of this begs the question of what is essential about the church?

The first part of that consideration is what is essential about faith in Christ? Essential to the Christian faith is the understanding that God loves the world so much that God could not keep distant from us. God became flesh in Jesus to be near us. Through Christ's life, death and resurrection we are offered grace, mercy, forgiveness and abundance life. God raising Jesus from the dead means we live without fear, even the fear of death. This is essential. And the good news is none of that is changed by anything, ever. None of this changed because we could no longer worship in our building. The church cannot be closed because the church is followers of Jesus determined to live in a way that this good news of Christ is proclaimed to everyone in every part of our living. We are not just Christians on Sunday. We live as Christ's people everywhere we are.

The second part for consideration is what is essential about what we do at church? Early in my ministry, a beloved church member greeted me every Sunday by putting her cool hands on my face, looking at me with smiling eyes and telling me she loved me. She did this exactly the way my grandmother did when I was a small child. Her greeting became an essential part of my Sunday morning experience. Many of you probably have similar experiences you consider an essential part of your experience of church for you. You look forward to a hug and a smile, the warm handshake at the door. You look forward to the people who sit next to you, to hearing the news of the week, giving high fives to kids and seeing their new toys. These interactions are essential.

On a more corporate level, things like singing, listening to the choir, praying at the altar, passing out bulletins, passing the offering plate, greeting one another, and participating in the sacrament of holy communion are essential parts of worship. Spending time with one another, sharing meals, praying with one another, holding hands, sharing coffee are also essential parts of our life together as a church family. Another essential part of our life together is that we are multi-generational. Our church family includes babies and beloved members in their nineties.

Unfortunately, many of these essential parts of our life as a church family are also precisely the kinds of activities that allow a virus to spread rapidly. Singing can spread the virus in a similar

way to coughing. We would never gather 50-70 people in a room and instruct them to cough continuously for 5 minutes at a time, multiple times an hour. But can we imagine worship with no singing? We are a large group who interacts together for an extended time. These interactions are much different than a quick trip into the store. More than one hundred of our regular worship attenders are over the age over 65 years old. What is church like when so many of our beloved members are missing? If they are present, how do we take care of them? These and many others are the questions our staff and leadership are considering. Know that we love you all so much. We miss our time together. In our present environment, being the church comes with some challenging considerations. We appreciate your patience as we seek to navigate them.