

April 4, 2020 Article 5

Greetings Brothers and Sisters,

We continue in this bizarre state of affairs. We must all be strong and of good courage, all the more as we approach the peak of the Coved 19 assault over the next two or three weeks. One day we will get through all of it and life will once again seem “normal,” whatever that is.

I hope no one is stir crazy yet. If it seems troubling I suggest that you get a book that provides an account of great suffering; such as, the peasant existence on the windswept steppes of Russia or the tragedy of the Dust Bowl days on the high plains of west central United States in the 1930s. We have yet begun to suffer. Nevertheless, probably like you I yearn for the “good old days” of January and February of 2020. How life can change on a dime! How it can float away like James’s vapor.

Sherry Lenz reported yesterday that while she and Ben do not yet have laboratory clearance for coronavirus, they have been quarantined for 14 days. They should be in the clear. I continue to encourage us all to be diligent in prayer, especially for our number who are on the frontlines: Ben, Sherry, Jennie, and Matt. I also want to add another to this special list that I had not thought of earlier, Bethany Stevenson. Perhaps she is not quite on the frontline, but certainly in the vicinity; part of the support group just behind the frontline. Hospitals are among the last places we want to be around these days unless absolutely necessary. Of course we continue to pray for all people who are in danger are suffering.

The extra time at home does give us time to think. Perhaps that is not an enjoyable activity for some. For others thinking at this time simply brings up visions that make you feel bad. I have had a long standing habit of thinking. Sometimes I think I drive Sharon crazy with it. I can’t seem to help it. Fortunately, sometimes I do think about good things; useful things. Mostly I think about questions; many more questions than answers. What good is the thinking, then, you might ask. I don’t know. I’ll think about it.

One thing I have been thinking about, other than the ugly circumstances, both present and potentially in the future, is the church; the *ekklesia*, the called out of God, the assembly. Historically we have taken very seriously, if not obsessively, the Hebrew writer’s admonition not to forsake the assembly (Heb. 10:25).” It may not be as obsessive with some in these modern times, but it still remains a benchmark for faithfulness. But, we are learning something in these troubled times about the core principles of the church. Assembling physically in a particular locale may not be the essence of assembling. Certainly, we see the early church meeting on the first day of the week to break bread (participate in the Lord’s Supper) (Acts 20:7), but we find we are unable to do that under these present circumstances. Yet, the church still meets. It still communes. Thanks to modern communication we are “assembling” remotely. Sounds like an oxymoron. We are able to assemble in spirit if not in flesh.

This does not suggest that we find remote assembling equally effective or more beneficial than physically assembling, but it may point out more clearly the point of the physical congregating. The early church may have been less rigid in its practices. Luke records that they continued

“**daily** with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread **from house to house** (Acts 2:46).” A few verses earlier he wrote, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers (Acts 2:42)” without identifying where these things took place. There, at least, seems to be a sense of greater flexibility, more mobility, and less focus on a location.

After this episode of life passes and we can once again return to the “assembly,” as we say, we should take some time to consider what we learned about the church. When we filter out all the things we are unable to do that we normally do “at the church,” and we observe what we are able to do and are doing, we might find what is really important; what the core purpose of the *ekklesia* is.

While we are doing our Bible reading and study, continuing steadfastly in prayer, and reaching out to our brothers and sisters with encouragement and support, take some time to think about what the central purpose of the church is.

God bless you all,