

## A Message from Pastor Dave

Dear Shepherd of the Valley Friends and Members,

As you know, the Governor of Idaho has proposed a four-stage plan to facilitate re-opening businesses across the state between now and June. Places of worship are listed in Phase 1 of the plan, allowed to reconvene at the earliest time possible.

The Church Council and I have discussed this change. I think everybody understands it would be better for the church *as an institution* to re-open sooner rather than later. Things run smoother when we're together in person. Connections are easier and schedules more regular. Offering is higher.

None of those things came up in our deliberations, though. Instead, we talked about our members and their families. We talked about our responsibility to the wider community. We talked about faith lived out and shared with the world not just in word, but in action.

At this time, we do not feel it is safe or faithful to consider gathering in person. We will continue to assess every two weeks as the situation evolves. Until we are sure that we can all come together safely, we feel that remote ministries are the faithful way to proceed.

None of us are disease experts. This decision was not reached with any surety about COVID-19. It was based on faith.

We cannot speak about "us" getting together without first defining "us". Any definition that includes some while excluding others is not faithful. We do not want to gather in a community where only the healthy or immune can participate. Holding services where half of us come joyfully while the other half stays away in fear would be a poor witness.

Worship is meant to be good for the community and the world. It's not a sacrifice we make to God, it's God's inspiration come among us, communally. Harming that community betrays a key purpose of worship.

In Isaiah 1, God says:

Bringing offerings is futile;  
incense is an abomination to me.  
New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation—  
I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity.  
Your new moons and your appointed festivals  
my soul hates;  
they have become a burden to me,  
I am weary of bearing them.  
When you stretch out your hands,  
I will hide my eyes from you;  
even though you make many prayers,  
I will not listen;  
your hands are full of blood.

God is upset because people say they are worshiping him but fail to show compassion and justice towards each other. We will not do this. Now and always, we choose the good of our neighbors over any personal or institutional benefit.

We look forward to the time we can gather again in person, when all can come safely to experience the warmth of God's love. Until that day, we affirm that love is present with each of us, where we are. God's grace lives among us when we gather at a distance through phones and computers, just as much as it does when we're in the pews together.

We'll talk more this week. Be well, and be kind.

--Pastor Dave