

March 18, 2022

Friends in Christ---
Greetings in the name of Jesus.

Back in June of '21, then again in October of '21, I quoted the cantankerous *Teacher* in Ecclesiastes who says, "Better is the end of a thing than its beginning; the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit." (7:8)

At the risk of making a presumption, it appears that we are nearing the pandemic's end. Several news sources indicate that we are now in an endemic rather than a pandemic. What that means is this, Covid is moving in the direction of being like the Flu. Some even believe that it will soon be handled as we already handle the Flu. The good news in this is that we already know what to do with the Flu, and within the past 3 years, we have had a crash course in learning what to do with Covid.

Given how for the past 7 days, the Covid positivity rate in Brevard County has hovered around 2.09% and daily cases average 5.2 per 100,000. Such numbers as these, taken from the Florida Department of Health, have motivated JOY's church council to move us quickly towards pre-pandemic practices. Details of these changes will be in the council president's April newsletter article.

Perhaps this news will raise comfort levels for those who have been away from regular in-person worship for so long. Perhaps this will also help us get back to business as usual. As a church family, we certainly have done admirably given what we have had to manage over the past 2-3 years. The people are weary. The pastor is weary. And, although I might be wrong to think this, I do believe that as we feel comfortable enough to do so, we should create our own individual plans to get ourselves back into in-person worship, to get back to being a family visibly together, and to actively engage in the faithful ministry of processing our pandemic journey together.

We have experienced a collective trauma. We need to be together to hear and share our stories, to see one another in person, to get a sense that we are indeed okay, and to be reminded that God has gotten (and is still getting) us through that trauma together.

I cannot underscore how grateful I am for each of you, especially in those times when the pandemic had seemed to have gotten the best of us. Your faithful tithing, faithful patience, faithful presence, and faithful love have made all the difference in how we have handled what the pandemic has brought our way. Thank you so very much for being---FAITHFUL!

Because you have been faithful, and because God is ever-faithful, JOY Lutheran did not go the way of St. James Lutheran, Hanford, CA, or the way of North Park Lutheran, Buffalo, NY. The pandemic closed those churches permanently. This was the story with so many congregations. Thanks be to God and thanks be to you, that is not the story of JOY. A recent article noted how, [in] "August 2020, Dave Kinnaman of the Barna Group told NPR...that as many as one in five American churches – or 20 percent – may close within 18 months." Because of faithful people and faithful God, that is not us.

In days to come, let us continue to make wise choices, to use hand sanitizer, to not impose our idea of what is best on others, to let one another do what each must do for the sake of comfort and peace. In short, let us continue take care to look to needs of our neighbor above our own personal preferences and individual practices. Yet, while caring for neighbor and self, as best as we are able, let us carry on, going onward and upward, getting back to being the JOY church family visibly together, as visibly gathered and as visibly active as possible.

When it comes to this pandemic that seemingly moves in the direction of an endemic, again we say, "Better is the end of a thing than its beginning!"
Stay well. Thanks for being so very faithful.

God bless and keep you,
JDB+