

Joyful in Hope (thoughts and ideas to encourage and challenge)

“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”

Romans 12:9

We sat in the DFW airport Monday night, awaiting our flight back home. The Dallas/Ft. Worth Airport is one of the busiest in the world, serving over 75,000,000 passengers each year. The airport is so big it has its own zip code, and takes up more space than Manhattan. But Monday night, it was eerily quiet. The main event on the TV monitors should have been March Madness, but instead every screen showed a different news outlet from around the world, reporting on the latest coronavirus concern.

Earlier that afternoon, I had written an email to you all, on behalf of the Elders, outlining Heritage’s response to what’s going on in our community and our State and the world, as together, we attack the attacker. It has determined that the best course of action for now, in addition to the obvious good health habits of purposeful handwashing, coughing and sneezing into your sleeve, not touching your face with unwashed hands, etc., is social distancing, and if need be, self imposed quarantine. It’s working in China, and seems to at least beginning to work in Italy and other European countries.

For Heritage members, that means no meeting together, at least for the next three weeks. It’s inconvenient, and it goes against our grain as free spirited Americans, and it seems to fly in the face of our belief that Christians ought to be together (Scriptures like, “not forsaking the assembly”, and “meeting together daily in the temple courts”, etc., come to mind). How are we going to stay in contact with each other, take care of each other, pray for each other, encourage each other, have fellowship with each other, commune with each other?

Below, I’m going to offer a few ways we can do those things, even if this moves into a full on quarantine. I know this isn’t a perfect solution. I know that the situation we find ourselves in is extreme, on a world scale. I know for some, the situation is inconvenient and for others, it is quite desperate, even deadly.

I also know that you and I, as Christ followers, have called to “*be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer*” (Paul’s words in Romans 12:9). I like the way Eugene Peterson puts it in the Message. He says you and I should remain “*cheerfully expectant. Don’t quit in hard times; pray all the harder.*”

We have a tremendous opportunity to let build up the body, even as we have to limit our contact with each other. Social media and communication have made it more and more possible to “reach out and touch someone”, even while we’re stuck at home. And beyond that, we have a great opportunity to be “light and salt” in a world that has, more and more, become dark and drab.

So, here’s what the Elders are suggesting:

1. Daily Encouragement – Each day, beginning now, an email entitled, Joyful in Hope, will go out to the Heritage family with words of encouragement and challenge. This is the first. I hope you’ll read it each day, and find strength. We’ll also put the daily edition of “Joyful in Hope” on the Heritage website.
2. Contact with and from the Elders – Tom and Ward and I are taking the new directory and dividing it up among us. In the next couple of days, you’re going to get a phone call from one of us, just checking in. If there is anything you need, or want us to pray about, or any other concerns you have, please let us know. We’ll continue to do that until we can meet together again. Once you’ve been contacted, you will know who your “contact elder” is, and we want you to feel free to contact us at any time.
3. Sunday Worship, Virtually Together - We are creating a Heritage YouTube channel, and beginning this Sunday, you’ll be able to access a video time of worship, with a message from God’s word, some thoughts for communion, and some suggestions and links to other worship videos, along with weekly updated prayer list. A new video will be posted by 10AM each Sunday.
4. Communion – We have a supply of self-contained communion servings. If you would like to pick some up, they are available in the church office. You can pick up what you need (please only take what you need), between 9 and 6, Monday – Friday. If you can’t make it out, for whatever reason, let Pete know, and we’ll bring some to you.
5. Staying in Touch – As you stay in contact with each other, and with anyone you know, let me challenge you to be an encourager, be the one who brings words of hope, the one who builds up, the one who is the hands and feet and voice of Jesus.

Let the certainly of God’s love be evident in you during this uncertain time.

Talk to you tomorrow. Pete