



Christ Presbyterian Church, New Haven

17 November 2020

Dear CPC Family (again),

In thinking about our current situation and of course the previous notification illustrating the virus' increasing proximity to our personal space and lives, I feel that we are at yet another inflection point needing additional attention. The fact is, with the significant uptick in Covid-19 cases in our region/city,¹ and projections of things getting worse before they get better, I know that many of us are struggling to discern our responsibility both to ourselves and to our significant others. We feel pressure not only to do the right thing, but perhaps as much, to avoid the appearance of doing the wrong things to those we respect in our respective "social circles" (and all the political/moral/intellectual judgments that can be projected in two directions respectively).

More specific to our Christian convictions, we are torn between the clear command of scripture and practiced at great expense throughout church history to "not forsake the assembling together... but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." (Heb. 12:25) and the clear command of scripture to "love our neighbor as yourself" (Mt. 22:39) such as to do all that we can do to stop the proliferation of this terrible virus.

With all this in mind, I would like to again reiterate what has been the position of our church since the very beginning. On the one hand, we should all come to church or attend a church event knowing the possibility that someone present could unknowingly be infected with Covid-19. This is then balanced with the assurance that our CDC/government informed mitigation protocols of masks/social distancing/hands were designed as if you *would* have an encounter with an infected person, and yet, given the presumed effectiveness of those protocols, it is only about a 5% chance of contracting the virus.

Take home? If you come, please be diligent to follow the government-based CPC guidelines as published. But if based on your own studied conscience relative to your own situation you don't come, do still participate in all the ways possible as to maintain the fellowship in the bond of unity.

Along these lines, if you haven't already, please do read Romans 14 (c.f. 1 Cor. 10) albeit inserting into the context our Covid-19 situation. (To come/eat vs. to not come/not eat as pertaining to the visible, flesh and flesh participation in the ministry of Word and Sacrament). At the heart of Paul's advice, he says this:

"whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." 1 Cor. 10:31

¹ Lest we get sidetracked debating the positivity rate in CT-- In applying the CT positivity rate of 1 in 20 to our participation in worship in the previous letter, it is true that the positivity rate is based on testing precipitated by Covid-19 related symptoms or contact. It is also true that a significant number of those tested are not precipitated by symptomatic concerns or contact (e.g. regular testing per various sector protocols).

“ Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him [both]. ” (Rom. 14:3)

Clearly, for Paul whatever important issues and/or decisions might divide us in this life, it is the power and preeminence of the gospel of Jesus Christ that it can never be allowed to divide us. This is exactly Paul's point in Romans 14:

Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother... let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding... Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. (Rom. 14:13, 19-20)

I know I have said nothing here that you haven't heard already if you have been around for a while. But I felt it important to acknowledge the struggle I know we are all having, even as we remain steadfast in our love for one another with the hope of the gospel.

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

Yours affectionately,
Preston Graham