



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (PCA)

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Dear First Pres Family,

October 29, 2020

As the Lord's Day approaches, here are four quick things to think about as we get ready.

I. Return to Two Morning Services

With the onset of cold and flu season, Session has returned to the practice of two morning services both to alleviate crowding in the auditorium as well as provide a service with more health and safety precautions for those especially concerned about respiratory infections at this time of year.

Since the prevalence of coronavirus is on the increase in our area, *regardless of whether you have a condition that places you at a higher risk of death (e.g. age, diabetes, obesity, etc.) or are caring for one who has such conditions or you simply want to be especially careful this time of year not to get the flu, you are most welcome and encouraged to attend the first service.* The first service is primarily for those with or caring for those with weakened immune systems, but it is **not** restricted only to such saints; the 9:15 service is open to any who have no conscientious objections to the Session's mask policy.

The second service at 10:45 a.m. is also open to anyone, however those with conscientious objections to wearing a mask in worship must attend this service.

Session's desire is to adhere to current public health recommendations of masking, distancing, and hand hygiene, which we believe - in God's providence - reduce the risk of disease spread. However, further study may show better effective measures and since we have no explicit command from the Lord on this, we do not want to prevent anyone from worshipping at the second morning service if she or he disagrees with us on this point, although this does pose increase risk to all present.

While there is disagreement on masks and coronavirus precautions in the congregation, we must not allow this diversity to diminish the mutual love and devotion we have to one another here. If you attend the second service, let me suggest you call or write to someone whom you haven't seen in a while at church. Likewise, if you attend the first service, I suggest you reach out to someone who attends the second. Hopefully by doing this we can maintain and strengthen the unity of the Spirit here at FPFO.

II. Seating in the Auditorium and Overflow

This past Lord's Day we again saw a record number of people come to worship between the two morning services. For this reason, please be especially thoughtful and courteous as you select seats. For example, **if there are three or fewer people in your family, please sit in the shorter pews along the wall so as to leave open the pews in the center for larger families and groups.** This will allow us to maintain a six-foot distance between households.

Thank you to those of you who persevere through worshipping in the "overflow" seating in the Fellowship Hall! I've wondered about using the Adult Sunday school room for that purpose instead. If you think the Adult Sunday school room would be more conducive to worship let me know.

Also for everyone live-streaming or viewing the service from the overflow area: I am sorry the picture quality has been so poor lately. I am working to rectify that issue; we *should* be broadcasting in HD.

NOTE: the bathrooms are not sanitized between users, so please adhere to strict hand washing discipline. But if you would like to volunteer to clean the bathrooms, please call the church office.

III. Remembering and Sanctifying the Sabbath Day

Last Lord's Day we concluded our brief consideration of the Fourth Commandment. The Scripture makes some of its most grand promises of blessing to those who delight in the Sabbath as well as strong warnings against disregarding the weekly Sabbath rest.

While it is hard to remove from our minds the images of packed hospital wards and refrigerator trucks used as temporary morgues from March and April in New York or Italy, yet - by God's kindness - the medical community now knows much better how to both prevent and treat this new virus.

As we reflect on the Sabbath day and keeping it holy, it's important to remember one of the key aspects of sanctifying the Sabbath day is gathering for corporate worship. If you have not yet returned to

public worship, I hope to worship with you here at church very soon. We continue to take steps to mitigate the spread of sickness here at the church especially at the 9:15 a.m. worship service.

There are risks of all sorts of sicknesses whenever one ventures out, so we must always balance the amount of risk for injury or sickness with three other factors: first **God's commandments**, second **God's providence**, and third **God's promises**. While God does require us to faithfully steward our own lives as well as those of others, He also commands us:

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Heb. 10:24-25)

We must trust God's commands are for our good and that He will - by His kind providence - preserve us both in His love such that His goodness and mercy pursue us always as He has promised. While this is not an excuse to be negligent and provoke His fatherly discipline, we can know that obedience to God's commands always brings blessings (yet not necessarily the sort of blessings we expected).

Obviously, if we are sick or exposed to sickness we stay home! But ordinarily we must take care not to neglect "meeting together" and sharing together in the means of grace even as we protect ourselves from contracting a disease. Our concern to guard against contracting a disease should not overwhelm our concern to obey God's commands to worship in the assembly of His people.

Obviously there are many factors (e.g. one's own health, the health of those for whom one is caring, etc.) to consider in "these unprecedented times," but I urge you not to make those decisions without also considering **God's word** and **God's providential care** and **God's promises** to His people.

Especially now that we have a morning worship service at 9:15 that is more secure, more well ventilated, and more socially distanced than ever before, I hope many who have faithfully joined us via livestream will consider returning soon to gathering for public, corporate worship on the Lord's Day.

IV. Confessing our Sin of Sabbath Breaking

As has been our custom during these sermons on the Decalogue, we will utilize a corporate confession of sin that is centered on the commandment we considered the previous week. This Lord's Day morning we will be confessing our sins primarily of violating the Fourth Commandment. We will use Exodus 31 as our call to confession, which reminds us remembering the Sabbath is not strictly an Old Testament ceremonial obligation but a moral duty for all people in every age.

This was a particularly difficult confession of sin to write because this command is - on the one hand - so comprehensive in its scope (dealing not only with our actions, but also our thoughts and speech) and - on the other hand - so misunderstood and forgotten nowadays.

In writing a confession of sin for the Fourth Commandment I decided simply to consider ways I myself frequently "fall short" (cf. Rom 3:23) of remembering the Sabbath day. I assumed if I am falling short in these areas, I am not the only sinner who has done so.

As we approach any corporate confession, we should use the words as aids to search our own hearts to reveal our need of grace and see how we can press on to greater obedience for the glory of God our Father and Christ our Redeemer. In a confession of sin, we should be careful not to confess the sins of other people(!), but focus on our own sinfulness and need of God's grace. To prepare for worship, you might consider previewing the bulletin from the church website.

Our own Westminster Larger Catechism provides a very helpful summary of the Scripture's teaching on the Sabbath. I've included some quotations from the Catechism on the next page. I hope this will help us all not only see how to better remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy, but also enjoy with deeper richness the blessings and benefits of God's Sabbath day. Remember our Saviour's words about the Sabbath: "*The Sabbath was made for man*" (Mark 2:27), so let us trust His words and expect abundant joy as we strive to enter the Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God in Christ.

Your Session of Elders,



Ryan Biese



Herman McConathy



David Bosshardt



Wil Davis

WESTMINSTER LARGER CATECHISM

No. 116, *The fourth commandment requires of all men the sanctifying or keeping holy to God such set times as he has appointed in his Word, expressly one whole day in seven; which was the seventh from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, and the first day of the week ever since, and so to continue to the end of the world; which is the Christian sabbath, and in the New Testament called the Lord's day.*

No. 117, *The sabbath or Lord's day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful; and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy) in the public and private exercises of God's worship: and, to that end, we are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day.*

No. 120, *The reasons annexed to the fourth commandment, the more to enforce it, are taken from the equity of it, God allowing us six days of seven for our own affairs, and reserving but one for himself, in these words, Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: from God's challenging a special propriety in that day, The seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: from the example of God, who in six days made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: and from that blessing which God put upon that day, not only in sanctifying it to be a day for his service, but in ordaining it to be a means of blessing to us in our sanctifying it; Wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.*

No. 121, *The word Remember is set in the beginning of the fourth commandment, partly, because of the great benefit of remembering it, we being thereby helped in our preparation to keep it, and, in keeping it, better to keep all the rest of the commandments, and to continue a thankful remembrance of the two great benefits of creation and redemption, which contain a short abridgment of religion; and partly, because we are very ready to forget it, for that there is less light of nature for it, and yet it restrains our natural liberty in things at other times lawful; that it comes but once in seven days, and many worldly businesses come between, and too often take off our minds from thinking of it, either to prepare for it, or to sanctify it; and that Satan with his instruments much labor to blot out the glory, and even the memory of it, to bring in all irreligion and impiety.*

FROM LEADING CHRISTIANS PAST AND PRESENT

Let a quiet and happy Sabbath observance awaken in you a longing for the fuller, deeper rest that will come when all our striving with sin is done, the work is at last complete, and we enter into our heavenly Sabbath. Until that day dawns, joyful Sabbatarianism can be a wonderful testimony to life governed by the Word of God and not the demands of the world. - David T. A. Strain, Pastor: First Presbyterian - Jackson, Miss.

The sabbath day is the day of all days when we focus on meeting with Christ...to experience the rest that only Christ can give you. - Neil Stewart, Pastor: Christ Covenant Church - Greensboro, N. Carolina

The business of week-days makes us forgetful of God and our souls: the Sabbath brings him back to our remembrance. When the falling dust of the world has clogged the wheels of our affections that they can scarce move towards God, the Sabbath comes, and oils the wheels of our affections, and they move swiftly on.

- Thomas Watson (1620-1686), English Pastor and Theologian

Upon the resurrection of Christ the original Sabbath obligation was by God fixed upon the first day of the week, because this day completed a second work even more glorious and beneficent than the world's creation, by the rising of Christ from the tomb. - Robert Lewis Dabney (1820-1898), Virginia Theologian