

Dear Sisters and Brothers of the Shenandoah District,

I write this letter with a passionate desire that our conversations and decisions reflect common commitment to scripture and our vocation as disciples of Jesus Christ. It is easy to lose that focus in the tumultuous and chaotic swirl that surrounds us. I find it difficult to remain centered.

I am thankful and grateful to be a citizen of a country that protects certain basic rights. The right to worship, the right of assembly, the right to due process and the list continues. This does not mean that America is living up to those ideals; we continue to struggle to be our best selves. At their best, however, these protected freedoms allow us a beginning point for conversation as citizens of this country.

I also believe the conversation regarding our rights and freedoms as American citizens is a secondary conversation to one that is more urgent. As citizens of the Kingdom of God, our primary concern is not about individual rights but shared responsibility. This conversation is guided by scripture and informed by our loyalty to Jesus. It is as we deliberately converse together around these common centers that the church has an opportunity to mirror a different way of being in the world.

It is in that spirit that I submit two Kingdom responsibilities for your consideration. While written in the context of COVID-19 and the opening of congregations, these responsibilities apply to multiple situations and, I believe, are deserving of ongoing reflection.

We have the responsibility to care for the most vulnerable and unprotected among us

- The Old Testament teaching cannot be ignored. The Torah is filled with instructions and teachings on how the Hebrew people were to treat the widowed, the orphaned, the stranger and the foreigner. Provision was made for those who did not have access to resources e.g., gleaning practices and the practice of jubilee.
- The prophets continue in the same vein. The book of Amos is filled with stern rebukes of a system that trampled on the rights of those without protection.
- In the New Testament, Jesus's very life and teaching modeled how we are to treat others. The Samaritan woman, the ten lepers, the variety of healings, the teaching of love of God and neighbor and you add to the list.
- Familiar texts include Matthew 5:1-12, Matthew 25, Romans 12:9-21, 1 Corinthians 13, Philippians 2:1-4 and again add your own scriptures.

Scripture is clear. Jesus demonstrated the way. Our neighbor is our responsibility, especially those most vulnerable.

And so, the question for consideration. **How do we love our neighbor during the opening of congregations?** That is our Kingdom responsibility.

We have the responsibility to practice sacrificial love

Listen to the words of Philippians 2:6-8

“Who being in the very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross.” NIV

Jesus could have claimed his “rights” as the Son of God and avoided crucifixion. Jesus gave up those rights in order to accomplish his work on the cross. Jesus modeled for us the meaning of sacrificial love, of laying down of his life for humanity.

I believe the question for us is this. **How do we model that same sort of sacrificial love to our neighbors and communities?** Are we willing to be last in line for the sake of Christ's gospel? That is our Kingdom responsibility.

Conclusion

These are not, by any means, the only responsibilities of citizens of the Kingdom. As we journey together during these difficult times, I invite us to reflect on these and other responsibilities we share as followers of Christ.

Serving Christ Together,
John Jantzi