

Reopening The Church (Buildings)

“Closed,” the sign said. After this I looked, and behold, I didn’t need the sign to tell me that. I was facing the door, the door was obviously closed and I knew I wasn’t going to be able to just walk through it. It would be a silly thing to try. The door would need to be opened first. Not rocket science. Pretty basic stuff. This is how it’s been with every door I’ve ever faced in my entire life.

All of us have faced a door with a “Closed” sign hanging on it and all of us know what it means, too. The sign is saying that normal operations aren’t currently underway. It means, for example, that there are no salespeople or bankers or mechanics about at the moment. Normal operations have been suspended for a time. Again, this is not at all unusual. Usually “Closed” simply means, “Closed Until Tomorrow Morning,” or, “Closed Until Monday,” or “Closed Until after the Holidays.” Sure, in some cases it means, “Out of Business.” But with COVID19, “Closed” means: “Closed Until ???” or “Mostly Closed Probably,” or “Not Entirely Closed but Not Really Open Either, It’s Weird.”

So what *is* unusual is to encounter a “Closed” sign on a church door. This is mostly because the Church has no doors.

Aaaand now you’re thinking one of two things. You are thinking either, “Why, the dear preacher has gone right off his rocker. Serves him right. He was precariously perched all along anyhow.” Or you’re thinking, “Why, it’s perfectly obvious that the Church has no doors, preacher. Why are you writing these perfectly obvious things? Don’t you have better things to do? We do.”

Either way, let’s proceed. We must make a distinction between the Church and the church buildings. The Church has no doors because it is not a building. The church buildings, however, have all kinds of doors: upstairs, downstairs, interior, exterior, big,

little, single, double, glass, wooden, metal, hinged, sliding, etc. Once we've made this distinction we realize that the Church cannot be closed because the Church is not a building, a collection of buildings or a campus. The Church is the body of Christ. And so, the Church has no doors. (Well, there is John 10:9 if you want to push it.)

The Church is alive. It is a living thing, and living things can't be closed. Living things can die, yes. But since the Church is the body of Christ and since the resurrected Christ is the head of his Church, the Church can't die either. So the church is neither closed nor dead and it is impossible for either of these things to happen, an important distinction for us to make when "Closed" signs are on display.

So, while the Church can't be closed, the church buildings can be and this can happen for all sorts of reasons. A pandemic is definitely one of them. Thankfully pandemics are unusual. How do we handle those? Well, if you're part of the Church leadership you pray together and use whatever collective wisdom God grants by his Spirit ... and you take the unusual step of putting "Closed" signs on the doors of our church buildings. Business as usual is not happening at this time. Those signs went up at Neely's Creek in March.

Perhaps another article at another time will be able to highlight the many ways in which the Church has carried on very-well-thank-you-very-much being the Church without regular access to the church buildings. The remainder of this article, however, is hopefully going to help us get through the church doors that are reopening, but first, a question for you.

Have you ever wondered in general just what the Church is supposed to *do*? You probably have, especially in 2020, and if you have you're not alone. Well, the primary thing that the Church is both created and called to do is to **worship** - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, specifically. That's it. That's the primary thing. And on June 21, a phased reopening of our church buildings began. Thus, select buildings are currently being opened on Sunday mornings only for the Church to once again carry out its primary function in person, and that is to **worship**.

The Neely's Creek Session and the Deacons, recognizing worship as being job number one for the Church, have put many safeguards in place to allow in-person worship to resume for those who discern themselves able to participate in person (for example: strongly recommending masks, disinfecting worship spaces before & after, spacing out the available seating, using separate buildings for the two services, etc.). They have also left the "Closed" signs in the doorways for any other church functions for the time being.

While the Session and Deacons have opened the doors of the church buildings at this time for worship, and whether or not you discern yourself able to come through them in person just yet, know that Jesus has opened another door for all of his Church which will never be closed. Let's look and see where we, the Church are headed, pandemic or no pandemic, and where we will all worship together. Let's take a quick peek through *this* door. Can you see? Can you hear?

"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" - Rev. 7:9,10

"Open." Business as usual underway in heaven.