



# Re-Open?

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We have been spending A LOT of energy on the question – *when will we reopen church?* Many are the guidelines and documents that map phase by phase reopening. Many have been using such resources to make decisions, and that's good.

Yet, today, several months into living in a COVID world and learning more about the virus and its swift transition, the more I wonder if this is the right question to ask at this time. For, the question has no answer. None of us can predict, at this time, when it will be safe for gather in person in large groups.

I think of the Serenity Prayer: *God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.*

I believe this is a time to pray and embrace the last sentence – *give me the wisdom to know the difference* to what I should adapt and adjust because I cannot change them. We cannot, at this time, do anything about the virus. We did not make COVID happen. COVID happened to us. COVID is our reality, the state of the world today. Denying its potency, going ahead and “reopening” as if it does not affect our lives, just does not work. Conditions that cannot be changed are to be accepted and adjusted to. We cannot, for example change the weather, so we accept and adjust to it through appropriate clothing, using heating and air conditioning, etc.

Since we cannot change the reality of COVID today, and gathering in church buildings in person poses danger, why not accept that we will not worship in person until at least the end of 2020. That will help us stop wasting our energy, and it will help us change the question form *when will we reopen*, to questions that can be helpful as we explore new possibilities for a new time.

Why not ask instead – What are the gifts of this experience? Where is God in this moment? What are we

learning? How are we growing? What are we gaining? What should we pay attention to? What is the Spirit saying to us? How is God calling us to BE CHURCH in this unusual time and beyond? It seems to me that in the last 20 years we, the church, have been stuck in another question – *what do we do about church decline?* Again, a question that has no satisfactory answer. The conditions that have brought on decline are complex. We cannot control decline. So why not ask - how can we be the best, the most vibrant church? What is our calling and purpose? How can we make a difference in our community? How can we partner with God to do ministry? How can we celebrate our gifts and what we have, instead of focusing on our lack and what we don't have? Questions that have no answers deplete us of energy. They need to be changed, replaced.

I believe at this time we are re-learning that church is not a building but a people; that many churches have more participants in worship online than in person, so more people are hearing the good news. We are discovering that we can be flexible and creative, and that we are the Body of Christ, a community, even if we cannot gather in person. Such as time, I believe is a time of awakening, reflecting and asking the right questions. It is time to accept the things we cannot change and concentrate on the things we can do something about. Besides, by changing the question we can also change the story, the narrative toward a new and bright yet different future.

For you see, as I write this there is another virus among us, in fact many viruses, about which we can do something. Racism is a virus made by humans, for God created only one human race. Racism did not happen to us we, humans, made it happen. Unlike COVID, there is much we can do about it. Perhaps this is a good time for us churches to awaken, to devote our energy to the things we can change, such as racism, by learning about them and eventually healing them. More next week .