



THE CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Worship Update The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC June 4, 2020

As we enter another week, another month of virtual worship and social distancing in the world, the question I am asked most often, or the question many people most want to ask, is this:

When can we come back to church?

When can we gather like we used to?

The question behind those two innocent and reasonable questions is this:

How can we come back together in a way that might be safe; that is, in a way in which coming to church does not lead to a certainty of contracting Covid-19? To the best of aggregate knowledge at this time, the most we can do is isolate, and when we come into the presence of others, wear a mask and physically distance ourselves. Even then, the virus seems to spread itself quite readily. As a responsible faith community, and I as your priest under the authority of our bishop, we must come together in the most faith-filled way that we know, which includes doing our best not to infect ourselves or others. What we do is grounded in our faith in Jesus Christ and our baptismal covenant:

**Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
*I will, with God's help.***

We have made a promise. As a priest, I am to live under the authority of my bishop and:

You are to love and serve the people among whom you work, caring alike for young and old, strong and weak, rich and poor.... In all that you do, you are to nourish Christ's people from the riches of his grace, and strengthen them to glorify God in this life and in the life to come. (from the Examination portion of the service of Ordination in the BCP)

For me, to love, serve, and nourish Christ's people at this time includes following a careful and cautious return to public worship. We are following the guidelines from the Diocesan "Reopening" document (www.edusc.org and emailed to all parishioners). In Stage 1, up to ten people may gather for in-person worship; we will begin doing so on Sunday, June 7, 2020. I have worked with the Worship Committee and a subset of volunteers from the vestry to "practice" this new way of worship, and we are ready to go forward to the extent that we can. We are holding two in-person services of Morning Prayer, one at 8:00 a.m. and another at 9:30 a.m., on Sundays through the month of June. (Sunday, June 7 is full and includes the volunteers listed above.) **If you have email**, you will receive a sign up form for a worship service time and date. **Do not worry if you do not have email**; call the office or we will call you to schedule a suitable service date and time. Lori Hawkins is filling in the worship schedule. Beyond our trained volunteers and committee, selection is random. I know that this schedule is an imperfect solution to a very difficult situation. Please be patient, love one another, and come to church as you feel comfortable being around other people.

We will continue to make our Sunday worship service available online. You may access our service via Facebook live, YouTube, and on The Church of the Redeemer's website (www.corgsc.org). Sermons are posted on our website, most often separate from the service.

When we might be able to “gather like we used to” is a question to which I do not have an answer. The course of Covid-19 is an unknown to the world. Our safe and appropriate response will continue to change as knowledge, experience, and faith inform us. Trust God to hold our lives and our future. Be courageous in living today, in this life that we have right now.

Please know that the Church of the Redeemer's schedule is not unique; no other Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Upper South Carolina is holding public services beyond the allowed ten persons. Many of our surrounding Episcopal dioceses are not planning on a return to public worship until at least July 1st; with some diocese's timeframe of “to be determined.” These dioceses include the Episcopal Dioceses of: South Carolina, East Carolina, Atlanta, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Western North Carolina. We are not alone in our careful response to Covid-19. God help us all in this most difficult time.

I close with a blessing from the late Rt. Rev. Duncan M. Gray, II:

Go forth into the world in peace:
Be of good courage,
Hold fast to that which is good,
Render to no one evil for evil.
Strengthen the fainthearted,
Support the weak,
Help the afflicted,
Honor all persons.
Love and serve the Lord,
Rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.
And the blessing of God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
Be upon you and remain
With you always.

In Christ,
Catherine+