



18 Mar 2020, Wednesday.

To: Pastors, EDC and members of Bethel Presbyterian Church,

Peace be with you. For those who are keeping a close watch at developing events, much has happened. We witnessed how oil price and stock markets reacted, tourism affected, production disrupted, panic buying escalated, and the list goes on. We are beginning to feel exhausted and burdensome from receiving unwelcoming news such as these. Our heads and hearts are both heavy. Still, heed what the Lord says,

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matt 11:28-30)*

What happened next? Matthew 12 tells us Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath (v. 8). Apart from worship and offering, one of the lawful realities of Sabbath is doing good.

*“If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” (Matt 12:11-12)*

If “doing good on the Sabbath” is lawful, and it means saving the sheep from a pit and restoring the shrivelled hand of a man, then reflecting this passage in the context of Covid-19 pandemic,<sup>1</sup> in conjunction with the local church, speaks volume to us. What does it mean to ‘do good’ for the Body of Christ and to the larger community? How could we continue to worship God in a socially responsible way?

Facing the onslaught of Covid-19, the biblical principle we adopt is to ensure the welfare of, or “doing good” for, the Lord's flock and our society. Bethel is thankful to God for the cohesive pastoral team and the highly dedicated church-wide Anti Covid-19 Taskforce. They are prepared to work in sync with both country advisory and church decision. In his video address, PM Lee cited, “What we are doing now is to plan ahead for some of these more stringent measures, try them out, and prepare Singaporeans for when we actually need to implement them.” He even suggested “... to shorten religious services, or reduce our attendance at such

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>, taken on 13th Mar 2020, 11:51am.



gatherings.”<sup>2</sup> We could continue our worship services as proposed by PM Lee. Alternatively, we can transform the conduct of our worship service while fulfilling our social responsibility. I hope I have not lost you here.

Scores of countries are closing their borders. Mysteriously, Italy was badly hit even when they are the first to ban flights in and out of China. Northern Italy is a tourist magnet. Travellers, infected or not, interacted and passed on to others oblivious to the pathogen. Silent transmission is the stealthy culprit.<sup>3</sup> On 15<sup>th</sup> Mar, New Zealand became the first to lockdown its country to halt Covid-19 spread.<sup>4</sup> The list continues to expand on a daily basis.<sup>5</sup> To get a better feel, we need not see further than the Straits of Johor.<sup>6</sup> Let us remember them and their struggles in prayer.

Recent returning travellers changed the score line. Locally, total confirmed and hospitalised cases have caught up with total discharged cases, 252 vs 114 respectively.<sup>7</sup> On 17 Feb, a total of 53 confirmed cases were hospitalised,<sup>8</sup> and today we have nearly tripled to 138! When Singapore wins accolades and praises from country leaders and international institutions, have we become complacent?

Healthcare staff are the backbone of this promising containment of Covid infected patients. Generally, they are not allowed home. If they do, the infection risk taken by all family members surges. I am reminded, in Singapore a great number of medical healthcare workers sacrificed their time, social interactions and obviously put their lives on the line. How do we face them if we insisted on our own selfish desires to come and go as we like, even using church service as an argument in point? I can't.

Social distancing remains viable to fight Covid and in so doing, protects the larger community, shield our extended family and safeguard society at large. Elderly and

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/pm-lee-to-address-nation-on-covid-19-situation-at-8pm>, taken on 13<sup>th</sup> Mar 2020, 6:45pm.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/economic-affairs-why-the-covid-19-financial-crisis-will-get-worse>, taken on 18<sup>th</sup> Mar 2020, 10:37am.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/11173645/new-zealand-all-arrivals-lockdown-14-days/>, taken on 18<sup>th</sup> Mar 2020, 9:44am.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/article/coronavirus-travel-restrictions.html>, taken on 18<sup>th</sup> Mar 2020, 9:47am.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/causeway-jb-singapore-traffic-travel-restrictions-last-crowds-12550138>, taken on 18<sup>th</sup> Mar 2020, 9:46am.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.moh.gov.sg/covid-19>, taken on 18<sup>th</sup> Mar 2020, 9:12am.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.moh.gov.sg/news-highlights/details/five-more-cases-discharged-two-new-cases-of-covid-19-infection-confirmed>, taken on 18<sup>th</sup> Mar 2020, 9:31am.



chronic patients are more susceptible to Covid. The rest of us may not be advanced in age, nor suffer from chronic ailments, but we certainly can be a carrier of the virus. If we do not distance ourselves enough, incidents like “SAFRA cluster” will occur. Responsibly, Muis cancelled all activities in mosques for 2 weeks,<sup>9</sup> while local Catholic mass remains suspended nation-wide.<sup>10</sup> And so, how will a grand old dame like Bethel manage this unique challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Bethel will carry on worship in an alternate manner. Let us prepare our hearts for it.

The people of God is called to worship Him. Worship took place instantly, like the senior servant of Abraham (Gen 24:48) and instances of worship in wilderness (Exo 7:16). Worship occurs at the tabernacle, Holy Temple, synagogues and churches. A Samaritan woman questions the venue of worship and Jesus replies, “Believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.” (John 4:21) Certainly, this is not directed at the Covid situation, but it tells us the core of worship, really, is in “the Spirit and in Truth”. (John 4:24)

Despite the challenge of a pandemic, we will change, adapt and continue to worship God. We may not be coming to Bethel physically, but through recordings or perhaps, live-streaming of worship beamed to you, we can still worship God together in a spiritually connected manner. Give us some time to gather the taskforce and work out the necessary. Minimally, we will record sermons, similar to the past experience.

The best we can do is attempt to overcome from the surreal present to some semblance of normalcy. This is what we will do. Bethel will suspend worship service in church for the next 3 weekends between 21<sup>st</sup> Mar to 5<sup>th</sup> Apr. We advise not to go to other churches lest we become a source of silent transmission to them and to us.

Our Pastoral team will continue to provide comfort and encouragement through the Lent devotion, prepare and preach sermon on various platforms, coordinate congregational ministries, adapt and provide pastoral care to worshippers.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.muis.gov.sg/Media/Media-Releases/12-Mar-20-Media-Statement-on-Temporary-Closure-of-Mosques>, taken on 13th Mar 2020, 12:02pm.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.tnp.sg/news/singapore/catholic-masses-remain-suspended-common-good-archbishop>, taken on 13th Mar 2020, 12:04pm.



Our Treasurer will review the expenses and provide appropriate measures to sustain broad ranging ministries, release more funding to support precautionary measures towards Covid, helping the needy through reliable channels, and empowering a yet-to-assemble Media Taskforce to facilitate worship off-site.

Our HR Chairman will work out a stagger work day and work hour schedule for pastoral and staff team. The very intention is to minimise contact and silent transmission that exist as a real risk. In so doing, we hope to ensure the team can work and serve in a safe and responsible environment.

Our EDC will look through all these and provide the highest authority and leadership. EDC will act as an overseer mandated by Bethel congregation. It will, when necessary, deliberate and brainstorm, raise flags and provide alternatives, enhance and engage, so that all we do is constructive, and not otherwise.

Our office staff will support in this fluid environment of constant change. They have been indispensable to enable critical roll-outs to date. They have been the hands and legs to what we are experiencing and receiving.

Our CG leaders and Sunday School teachers will continue to engage their groups and classes, call them, contact them, care for them, pray with them. In particular, when news of panic and despondence hit the headlines, comfort them and point them to God. Overseas students may be returning home and let us extend our concern for them. It doesn't help when we hear Italians above 80 will be left to die.<sup>11</sup> God says, "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!" (Isa 49:15)

Our worshippers will continue to worship, listen to the audio, listen to the Lord and His Word, sing praises and pray as a family, as a unit, as a couple, as an individual. In the fellowship of the saints, let us worship our Lord as a Body of Christ.

Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, "it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath". Humbly yours, Rev Lim Tau Wei.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/03/14/italians-80-will-left-die-country-overwhelmed-coronavirus/>, taken on 18<sup>th</sup> Mar 2020, 11:01am.