

The crisis facing our nation due to the continuing advancement of the Covid-19 virus is foremost in our thoughts at this present time. One message that has consistently been conveyed to us is that this pandemic will have an impact on all our lives. For some, the consequences will be devastating. We therefore need to pray that the LORD will 'in wrath remember mercy' and that these terrible circumstances will fall out rather 'unto the furtherance of the gospel' (Habakkuk 3:2, Philippians 1:12). We should also be thankful that although we are often grieved by the ungodly conduct of our ruling authorities, they are seeking to fulfil their God-given responsibility to protect us from danger without revoking our civil liberties. This is a time to pray for them and to submit ourselves 'to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake' (1 Peter 2:13).

Current government advice directs all people over the age of seventy, and all those with underlying health conditions such as chronic respiratory problems, chronic heart disease and diabetes, to avoid all unnecessary social contact. It also advises all citizens to minimise use of public transport and to avoid public gatherings. Since the Covid-19 virus is continuing to spread it is almost inevitable that further restrictions will be imposed on us in coming days. Yesterday evening, the elders were able to discuss this matter at length, with particular reference to how it is likely to affect us as a church and congregation.

Our position as an eldership is that corporate worship and public proclamation of the word should be abiding priorities for every local church. Moreover, we are not to forsake 'the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is' (Hebrews 10:25). Nevertheless, we are required by the law of God both to preserve human life and to love our neighbours as ourselves (Exodus 20:13, Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 19:19, 22:39, Mark 12:31-33, Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9-10, Galatians 5:14). At the present time, these Biblical principles appear to conflict with one another. Yet it seems to us that this apparent tension is resolved by the principle stated by the prophet Hosea and repeated by our Lord: 'I will have mercy, and not sacrifice' (Hosea 6:6, Matthew 9:13, 12:7). We do not compromise any principle when we show mercy by acting responsibly.

Following government advice, and prayerfully seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit to discern the will of God, we have decided to suspend public worship at Evington Chapel with immediate effect and until further notice. This is deeply regrettable, but it does not mean that the church will cease to function. There will be changes to cope with, but we need to persevere by the grace of God and seek to come out of this situation stronger than we were when we went in. We have been in contact with other local churches and can confirm that our response to this situation is consistent with that of others.

While these are early days and detailed plans for the coming months are still being formulated, please be advised of the following short-term arrangements:

1. The Evington Lecture scheduled for Saturday 21st March has been postponed. If conditions allow, it will be rescheduled for the autumn.
2. There will be no services at Evington Chapel on Sunday 22nd March, but we will be posting a link on our website to a live-streamed service. We recommend that all members of the congregation tune into the same service so that we can be edified together.
3. The Trinitarian Bible Society meeting due to take place at Melbourne Hall on Wednesday 25th March has been cancelled.

We have also set some short to mid-term goals.

1. We want to ensure that provision is made for those who do not have computer equipment or internet access and are therefore unable to access live-streamed services.
2. We would like to develop online streaming facilities for Evington Chapel so that we can meet remotely.
3. We hope to develop resources that will help us to maintain regular contact with one another.
4. We are considering the introduction of a chapel prayer diary and devotional materials that can be circulated by post or electronically.

In addition to the provisions that we are seeking to make, we would encourage all friends to maintain regular prayer and Bible reading habits, to read helpful Christian books and to listen to edifying online services and sermons. We are happy to assist with identifying suitable material.

The elders are determined to ensure that no member of the congregation feels at any time that they have been forgotten or abandoned. We are always available to speak by telephone and, when appropriate, can arrange other forms of contact. We also wish to assure all friends that we are willing to help with practical needs insofar as we are able to do so.

At this difficult time, we need to maintain and nurture our Christian fellowship and keep in mind that we belong together as a company of God's people. The devil may try to use these present circumstances to divide us, and there is a danger of us drifting apart. But we do not need to be afraid. Our Lord has promised that he will never leave us, nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5) and 'with Christ in the vessel' we may 'smile at the storm'. Furthermore, this present affliction is an opportunity to prove the faithfulness of God and to demonstrate that the chapel building and Lord's Day services are not the only things that hold us together.

Please join with us in praying:

1. That God's mercy will be extended to this world, especially in those places where this pandemic is further advanced;
2. That God's cause and kingdom will be extended through these difficult events in providence;
3. That we will be helped as we explore different opportunities and seek to come to grips with new technologies;
4. That the bonds that hold God's people together will be strengthened;
5. That this crisis situation will strengthen faith and give new life to the church.

'Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things...and the God of peace shall be with you', Philippians 4:8-9.

Yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andrew" with a small number "2" written below it.A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jonathan P. Davery".