

Pastor Brian's  
Mid Week Message  
January 20, 2021

**"WORSHIP...IT'S WHAT WE DO!"**

*"Let us not neglect meeting together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near". Hebrews 10:25*

As more and more of our "seasonal" northern members have returned to us in the past couple of months I have been made aware of an anxiety on the part of some about our worship practices here at Trinity Lutheran Church of SW Florida, especially with respect to current and ongoing pandemic. Sadly, what I've been made aware of has come to me secondhand. I would hope that anyone who has concerns, about anything that we do here at TLC, would feel that they could come to me directly to express them. I wanted to take the opportunity today to explain again what our policy of worship is, and the rationale behind it. First and foremost, we must understand that we the Church, and in particular THIS church, is "worshiping community". Worship is what we do, and worship is the most important thing that we do. God has called His people, invited us, from the time of creation to come into His presence to receive His gifts. Specific instructions were given at Mount Sinai, in the Law of Moses, as to how worship was to be carried out in Old Testament times. As Christ has fulfilled the law for us, and we are no longer under the law but under grace. We have great freedom in how we worship, but our worship must continue to keep God, in the person of His Son Jesus Christ, as the object and subject of all worship. Worship is that time and place where we step out of the secular world into sacred space, where Jesus comes to us truly and substantially to offer His gifts of forgiveness and eternal life in Word and Sacrament, and in turn to receive our praise, thanksgiving, and prayers. Worship is not something we have to do, remember...we're not under the law...but rather something we GET TO do, as our Lord invites us to be with Him, to hear Him and to feast as His table in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood. Since the very beginning of this pandemic here, as it unfolded around us last March, we have sought to be obedient to our call to worship, while at the same time striving to be good and caring citizens of our nation according to the command given in Romans 13:1-2. The policies adopted by the leadership of the congregation; me the pastor, the Board of Elders, and the Church Council, have consistently been to follow the orders and recommendations of the State of Florida Board of Health. We shutdown from Mid-March to early May according to those guidelines, offering online worship only. When restrictions were eased, we began on site worship again, social distancing and limiting our capacity first to 25%, and then to about one third of our available seating. Four rows of seats have been removed to better enable our distancing. As the wearing of masks where social distancing was not possible was recommended this past summer by our government, we've strongly recommended that masks be worn by all attending worship as we arrive and again after service. As the State of Florida never mandated that masks be worn, we at TLC have not mandated masks either. As in restaurants and other establishments in Florida, once seated the continued wearing of a mask is the choice of each individual worshiper. During the service I do not wear a mask, as I know that there are a number of us with hearing impairment who read lips, but I do wear a mask during the communion distribution. As we gather as God's people in worship there are three "C's" that I believe we must prayerfully consider. They are, "Call, Confidence, and Care". We are called by God, personally invited, to gather before Him as a congregation in Word and Sacrament. We are called to boldly, confidently, approach His throne of grace. *"Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."* (Hebrews 4:16) Since before all creation, our God has set forth the number of our days, before anyone but Him knew about a pandemic that would assail us in the year 2020 into 2021. We trust in Him to provide for us and preserve us until He calls us to Himself. At the same time, we are a CARING community. We must be aware of how our conduct affects those around us, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are never to exercise our freedom in Christ and the Gospel to the detriment of others. So, I ask all of us to

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pray that the Spirit would lead us each personally into what is right, proper, and best for all. In conclusion, I know that there are a number of members in our family in Christ here at TLC who are not in a place where you can "take the risk" of contracting this virus by being present here for on-site worship. I pray that all of this would immediately go away, that God would wipe it away, and things could be "normal" again. Until this threat passes, we who are gathering for worship understand these concerns and encourage you to remain connected through our online Facebook presence. We long for the day that God would bring health and healing to us personally and as a nation and world. Always remember...remember who God is, the almighty, all-knowing and all present Creator and Sustainer of all things. Remember that God is love! (1 John 4:8) Self-sacrificing and self-giving love for all of His people. Our God assures us, "Never will I leave you and never will I forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5b)