

Wednesday Facebook Recorded Broadcast
Revd. Dr. Scott Everett Couper
Centre Congregational Church
May 6, 2020

Hello, friends. I am wondering if my days of weekly Wednesday Facebook broadcasts are numbered. I read that on or about April 12 the state of Vermont plateaued and on or about May 10 we should see active cases of COVID-19 decline. It looks like a month long plateau. One state official stated, “It was inspirational seeing how closely Vermonters adhered to the [physical distancing] directions’ – a result ‘that certainly was not a given’”.¹ We ‘flattened the curve’, as they say. I read in *The Commons* today the town offices will soon be gradually re-opened.²

I am proud of Vermont. I am proud of Brattleboro. I am proud of Centre Church. The COVID pandemic has been difficult on many of us. Some have had surgeries and dental appointments delayed. Some of our family members have been laid-off of work. I know it has been especially difficult on our members in nursing homes and rehabilitative centres as they have been quarantined without visitors. I know we all miss gathered worship in our much loved sanctuary. Yet, despite our hardships, we have persevered.

¹ Olga Peters, “Measuring a Pandemic”, *The Commons*, May 6, 2020.

² Olga Peters, “Brattleboro Reopens Town Office – a Bit”, *The Commons*, May 6, 2020.

I do worry that prematurely decreasing physical distancing regulations will eventually land us right back where we were. Gun-toting protests in places such as the Michigan capital (fuelled by dog-whistles from Washington, D.C.) sadden me and astound me.

I have jumped-out of a plane at 10,000 feet before. Demanding the government prematurely reopen the economy is like jumping-out of a plane, deploying the shoot, and then taking-off the parachute immediately after it violently stemmed the rate of decent. Honestly, who takes off a parachute after expressing relief that it deployed and merely slowed one down? That would be crazy. So are the antics of some of our citizens and states.

At Centre Church, we will approach the matter of reconvening gathered worship in our sanctuary in a sober and conservative manner. The gospel of Jesus Christ centers around *love* – not worship. The best way that I can love all of you is to keep all of you healthy and alive.

I will share with the deacons and Council what I believe we should be thinking about when we decide when to re-open the church building.

1. Is it safe for our most vulnerable members to worship corporately? We will not ask the question, 'Will I be safe?' This is not a matter of personal freedom nor personal welfare. The decision to re-open is a decision that

risks the death of *others*. Our membership is primarily elderly. So, we can only re-open when it safe for the elderly.

2. I love and trust my fellow ministers in the Brattleboro area. I adore and have faith in Shayna Apell, Lise Sparrow, Suzie Webster-Toleno, Shawn Bracebridge, Robb Hamm, Audrey Walker, and Jeremy Kirk. I can't imagine making a decision that does not also coordinate our re-opening with them and thus in concert with our neighboring area churches.
3. Related to the above, though I serve a congregational church that values as its polity local church agency and autonomy, I am also a firm believer in the wider church. I listen to my elders. I heed the advice of my colleagues. I follow with respect the benevolent guidance of my wider church leaders in the Windham-Union Association, the Vermont Conference, and the national body of the United Church of Christ.
4. Last, but certainly not least, as we begin to contemplate gathering again on Sundays, I will seek the counsel of all of you who are my friends in Christ at Centre Church. I invite you to share your thoughts and feelings, in a constructive manner, to the deacons and Council members of our church so that we can take your views and perspectives into consideration. I want to be sure that all who wish to voice their opinion are heard.

Allow me to close by stating how proud I am of the Council for adapting to a new format of meeting. I want to thank the Worship Team for its weekly efforts to plan and improve all of our worship service. I would like to thank the Technical Team for 'up-ing' its game in a crisis and ensuring that we continued to fellowship together. I would like to thank Jenifer Ambler and Bruce Ladenberger for ensuring that our services and sermons reach everyone in our church. I would like to express my personal appreciation for Matthew Kennedy's return to our fellowship. We dearly missed his love of the church and his many talents - that accompanied Holly's.

Perhaps I am most grateful for coming to know Lisa in Italy, the Balls in the mid-west, Linda in North Carolina, and the Mann's in Florida during this crisis. While in one way the COVID-19 virus drove us apart, in many many other ways it pulled us all closer together.

And for that, I give God all the thanks and glory.

Be well.