

July 10, 2020

From: Pastor Allen

Dear Friends,

On July 1, Marianne went to Georgia to visit her mother and sisters. She got home late Sunday afternoon. Monday afternoon she worked late to catch up, so when I got home from work, I went ahead and walked, Todd, our cooped up and eager border collie.

When Todd and I returned from our walk, Marianne was on the deck talking on the phone. When she finished her conversation she said, "Okay, you ready for something that's going to complicate our lives?"

"Complicate our lives?" I said.

Marianne's sister had just learned that she tested positive for Covid-19, and for four straight days, the sisters had eaten together, taken evening walks together, and played board games with their mother together. That evening, Marianne and I called everyone in Jonesborough with whom we had had contact on Monday to let them know that they had been exposed to someone who had been exposed to someone who had tested positive for the coronavirus. That may sound a convoluted and not particularly dangerous scenario, but that's how a pandemic works. A sneeze here, a chuckle there, a hearty hello from a neighbor and anxiety, illness, and occasionally death creeps around the planet, one person at a time.

On Tuesday morning, Marianne went to the Washington County Health Department to be tested. As of mid-Friday afternoon (July 10), we still have not heard her results. The increasing number of tests has slowed the process. In the meantime, we have been lying low at home, working remotely, cancelling plans to see our kids, and nervously counting every cough, sniffle, ache, and bead of sweat. So far, we have shown no symptoms, but it's a humbling and scary feeling to know that even if we don't feel sick, we could be helping to spread a very serious virus.

So, I will not be leading worship this coming Sunday. The Rev. Diana Moore will lead us in worship and in prayer. Whether Marianne tests positive, I'll get tested next week, too. And I'll remain away from

the office until I hear from my test. If I test positive, I'll stay away from the office for at least another two weeks.

All this reminds us of how crucial it is to wear masks, wash hands, and generally to limit our exposure to others. It also reminds us how crucial it is to make sure our plans to resume public worship follow careful and thorough protocols to keep members of our church family safe in each other's presence. At the moment, we are still looking at our August 9 date for returning to limited (30% capacity) in-person worship. And a new team has been formed to implement the recommendations approved by the session.

Going to church will feel a little different than it did for a while, perhaps quite some time, and our ways of doing ministry in and for the community will change. Our mission, however, does not. We will continue to celebrate and embody the love of God in Jesus Christ as we work for peace, reconciliation, and justice for all whom God loves.

Blessings,

Pastor Allen