



May 28, 2020

Statement on Reopening

There comes a point where not acting on your conviction is compromise, where inaction becomes a violation of your conscience. I have reached that point where I can no longer just sit back and wait for things to change.

It was a similar sentiment that caused Thomas Jefferson to coin the words, *When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary...* When the rights of people have been denied, rights to which God entitled them, it is time to stand up.

During this time of global pandemic, we have willfully surrendered those rights, temporarily, for the common good. And it was just to do so. However, when it is acceptable for hundreds of people to shop at Walmart but against the law for eleven people to be in a house of worship, the restrictions placed on us have become unreasonable.

When this virus hit our nation, it was *reasonable* and *righteous* for us to come together, to sacrifice, in order that our healthcare system would not be overrun. It was *reasonable* for us to further limit ourselves to “flatten the curve” and to protect the most vulnerable. It is *reasonable* for us to willingly surrender some of our freedoms for the good of others. But when the goalposts keep being moved, when the timeframe gets pushed off to an indefinite, indeterminate amount of time, when the “scientific models” that our leaders used for justification have continuously changed and are now, by their own admission, “completely wrong”, it is time for us to ask, “What are we waiting for?”

We do not question that our leaders acted in good faith. Neither do we question that the lock-down has slowed the spread of the virus. But slowing something and stopping it are not the same thing. And the cost of slowing it has been tens of thousands of people in our area losing their jobs, unable to provide for their families; it has been small businesses built by the dreams and sweat of our neighbors that may have been forever destroyed; it has been the decimation of our local healthcare system with thousands of healthcare workers laid off; it has been countless lives lost because of the inability to get preventive care or procedures deemed by some *nonessential*; it has been an unprecedented rise of mental health issues; it has been a historic increase of drug use and overdoses; it has been an increase in child abuse and domestic violence.

And how do you quantify the cost to the single parent who has been forced to become a substitute teacher, unable to work? Or how it's affecting the children themselves?

The virus is very real. The health dangers it poses must be taken very seriously. It would be wrong, it would be foolish to diminish that.

Our good intentions to slow this virus, however, have had disastrous, unintended consequences. The effect these policies have had on lives has been devastating. We pray our leaders will weigh wisely the costs that we are paying compared to the benefits of continuing this course.

But while they do that, it is time for us to stand up and say, *we are unwilling to further surrender our God-given and Constitutionally-guaranteed right to assemble for worship*. That is why on Sunday, June 7th we will once again reopen our campus for corporate worship.

While we prefer to submit to authority and believe that not doing so should only be a last resort, there comes a point where it becomes *unreasonable* to do so, where the government has stepped over the line and where it is appropriate to stand up and say so. Resuming public worship services cannot wait until the governor of New York decides it's okay. We need neither the Governor's consent nor the President's permission to follow the scriptural directive to meet together for worship or to exercise our Constitutional right to do so.

Corporate worship is an integral part of our faith. At Journey, we know that church was never intended to be a service in a building but a people on a mission. But that does not mean that corporate worship is unimportant. It is, in fact, essential. It is only proper that we honor God by joining together weekly for worship. Corporate worship also provides a spiritual experience that is powerful, sacred and irreplaceable.

These convictions do not require that we move forward foolishly. We must take all the precautions we can to do so safely. This includes the wearing of masks and social distancing.

And we also realize that the steps that we take that are *reasonable* for us, will not be reasonable for everyone. Many will not yet feel comfortable in a public worship service. Some, particularly those who are most susceptible, *should* not feel comfortable in a public worship service.

For these reasons, we ask that any among us that are considered vulnerable to this virus, please continue to join us online. *Please do not join us in person if it poses a health risk to you*. We want you well!

If you are not comfortable joining us for any reason, *please stay home*. If you feel it is in your best interest to refrain from joining us, *please do so*.

This is *not* a test of spirituality or of faith: We are simply opening the doors to those who feel they are ready to rejoin the community of believers in person. For some, it will take more time to get there. The only *wrong* thing to do is to do this before you feel it is the *right* thing to do.

As we fully respect those who feel it is not yet the right time to join together, we also assert it is not right to make those who feel that it is, to wait.

There are many churches in our area that feel it is in the best interest of their people to delay holding services. There are others who are making preparations to reopen in the next few weeks. There is no right or wrong, spiritual or unspiritual position on this; each pastor must decide what is in the best interest of their people and what God is saying to them. And the people, also, should make their own decision.

I respect those who are waiting. I also respect those who have moved before us. *I simply want to follow what I feel God is saying to me and do so in a way that is best for the people I'm privileged to serve*.

The consent of the governed

The second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence states: *We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed....*

Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness are God-given, *unalienable* rights (meaning rights from which we cannot be separated).

While we sincerely appreciate the government's efforts to keep us safe, in America, the primary purpose of the government is not to protect our *health*, but to protect our *rights*.

Whereas, our government derives its authority from the consent of the governed, in regards to the State's prohibition on corporate worship, we are now, respectfully, rescinding our consent.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim W Schmidt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'T' and 'S'.

Tim Schmidt
Lead Pastor

What does this mean?

- Our doors will be re-opened for corporate worship Sunday, June 7th at 11am.
- We will hand out masks as people are entering the building and request that everyone wear one for the duration of the service. (If you have your own, please bring it).
- We will maintain social-distancing per CDC guidelines with rows 6 feet apart and maintaining a safe distance from non-family members.
- For the safety and comfort of others, we will ask that there be no hugs, handshaking or physical contact.
- We will not be offering any kids programs at this time.
- We will dismiss orderly and ask that you exit the building immediately after the service.

Q & A

Should I bring my children?

Parents will have to decide whether or not their child is ready to sit in an adult service. Can they respect social distancing? Will they be disruptive to others? Is the subject matter appropriate for children? (Remember we're presently in a series talking about relationships. There will definitely be some adult-oriented material!)

Do I have to wear a mask?

Yes. For the duration of the service.

Can I fellowship with other believers?

Even if you and they feel comfortable hugging, shaking hands or standing in close proximity, we ask that at the present time, this not be done on the church property.

What if I don't agree with this decision?

Not everyone is expected to! We are simply opening the doors for those who are ready to come back. If you are not comfortable, please continue to join us online!

Is there Scriptural precedent for not obeying authority?

Yes. In Acts 4 the authorities told Peter and John they were no longer allowed to preach in Jesus' Name. They replied, *Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him?* (Acts 4:19). We should submit to authority until we are asked to violate our conscience or the Word of God.

Further, just as believers, for us the law of God supersedes any other law, as Americans, the Constitution is the law of the land. It supersedes any state or local mandate. When we disregard an unconstitutional order, we are not disobeying the law; we are asserting that the order is illegitimate.

What if Journey isn't my home church – am I still welcome?

Everyone is welcome. But we ask that you respect the leadership of your local church. When they re-open, please join them.

Will there be singing?

Yes. Singing is an essential, non-negotiable part of our worship.