Light at the End of the Tunnel

I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. Psalm 40:1

Any time we face problems of any sort, we’re more than ready to escape. It does not take long for us to feel confined, restricted, uncomfortable, or even frustrated when things don’t go like they’re “supposed to.” Most people put up with obstructions pretty well for a time; but there comes a breaking point in which some blow up, some clam up, and others give up. Hopefully none of us has gotten to any of these points in our current situation.

All the way through difficulties, it’s important – no, it’s essential – to pray. Prayer includes elements of trust, confidence, dependence, and release. Early on we wait on the Lord. If time elapses without clear answers, we begin to get more serious and contemplative. If there are still no positive changes we can get antsy. Then we cry out to the Lord in our distress, like David did in Psalm 40.

Dark times wear us down. At the same time they are an amazing indicator of our character and our faith. They work us over and provide opportunities for growth. But if you’re anything like me, I’d rather grow another way. Regardless, we all go through darkness. But when we pray and the Lord has decided that it is time for us to get back to normalcy, life takes on a new meaning; it’s as if we see light at the end of the tunnel.

We’ve been praying about our regathering for two months and finally, the time has arrived! We’re not always sure about the ways of the Lord; but we can always be confident that His ways and decisions are best. Our Lord is in control of all things – even the decisions made by government are not independent of God (“The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will,” Proverbs 21:1).

As you know, on Monday the governor opened the door for churches to resume worship services. As much as possible we want to ensure everyone’s safety and comfort. For church gatherings this is a somewhat challenging operation during this time. The virus is real, and for some it is potentially life-threatening. At the same time, according to mass.gov, Massachusetts has only 1% of its population with confirmed cases. Either way, we want to do what’s best and right as we get back together again. The deacons and I have been discussing how we would go about re-establishing our worship times and now the time has come. We have come up with some basic, sensible procedures and we have waited to hear what the governor would say in addition.

Let’s look at IBC’s plans first, and then the governor’s plans.

As far as our plans go, IBC intends to resume collective worship this Sunday, May 24, at 11AM. Even though we are allowed to have as many services as we want, we have decided to begin with only a Sunday morning service. For the current time there will be no Sunday School, no Sunday Evening service (except online), no classes or nursery, and no Wednesday meetings. The service will be a regular morning service in the auditorium which will include prayer, singing, giving, and preaching.

We will be sure to have the facility in clean and working order. At some point after the service (before the next one) the church will again be cleaned. Even though an entire week will pass before the next service we still plan to clean all surfaces and doorknobs before the next service. Restrooms will be available for use but should be
used only if necessary. The kitchen and the water bubbler will not be available for use.

It is common for people at church to shake hands and even to embrace. While we’d rather not prohibit either one, we would advise that people refrain from it while in the building. We will not have greeters shaking hands, and our door ushers have also been instructed not to shake hands as you enter.

At this time those over 65 years old and those who are sick or have serious health risks are advised by the CDC to make wise decisions about leaving their homes. IBC will not prohibit admission to any person 65 or older; but we do reserve the right to deny admission to anyone of any age who is obviously sick or who has recently been sick.

Please remember that our service will begin at 11. People are welcome and encouraged to arrive early (there are no restrictions on the amount of time we spend in the building). We encourage everyone to enjoy the Christian fellowship. Please also remember that although things have been different, and although currently we are under some unusual guidelines, our time at church is still a regular Sunday worship time. We wish to make the Sunday Services as normal and as worshipful as always. We therefore suggest a worshipful attitude, regular church attire, and godly conversation.

As far as the governor is concerned (per Mass.gov), in addition to our own guidelines, the State House has added only two points: 40% building capacity and wearing face coverings or masks.

1. “All places of worship shall limit occupancy to 40 percent of the building’s maximum permitted occupancy level as documented in its occupancy permit on record with the municipal building department or other municipal record holder. The occupant count shall include all persons inside the place of worship, including attendees and staff.” (mass.gov)

The 40% building capacity means that IBC can accommodate over 100 people in the auditorium at any given time. At this early stage we assume that capacity will not be a problem. Our ushers will keep track of how many people are in the building and will help in suitable seating.

2. “All attendees and staff must wear face coverings or masks in accordance with COVID-19 Order No. 31 and the Department of Public Health’s Guidance while inside and while entering and exiting places of worship or otherwise participating in in-person services, except where a person is unable to wear a face covering or mask because of a medical or disabling condition.
   - “For children between age 2 and 5, the wearing of a face covering or mask is at the discretion of the child’s parent or guardian. Children under the age of 2 should not wear a face covering or mask.
   - “A person who declines to wear a face covering or mask because of a medical or disabling condition shall not be required to produce documentation verifying the condition.
   - “Place of worship may refuse entry to a person who refuses to wear a face covering or mask for non-medical reasons.” (mass.gov)

In other words, most people should wear a mask in church. We realize that wearing one will be unusual and somewhat restrictive (especially for singing!) but it’s a small price to pay for the fellowship we’ve been missing and longing to have!
IBC plans to add services and programs as time goes on. Our goal is to return to normal services and a full schedule. For the time being, we will still be pre-recording Sunday Morning and Evening sermons for viewing on our website. We do not plan to continue this indefinitely but are doing it temporarily for the convenience of those in our congregation who are sick, at risk, and/or elderly.

We realize that not all people should or will be able to join with us in these first few weeks. We want the atmosphere to be as comfortable and worshipful as possible. Our purpose remains what it always has been: to bring honor to the Lord by collective worship and fellowship. We’ve been praying for this day. Some are “chomping at the bit” to return; others are unsettled about public gatherings.

Let’s respect each other’s opinions and feelings; and let’s continue to pray that we will follow the Lord, that we will worship Him appropriately, that our fellowship will build us up in Him, that we will remain healthy and safe, and that our testimony will be strong.

We’ve been in this tunnel for over two months and are just now enjoying the first rays of light! I hope that we have all been faithful during these past weeks. I trust that we will be faithful now. Continue to pray for the services. Continue to pray for safety. And continue to pray for those who have been or who are sick. Now that the time has come for us to begin our return, let’s do so with love and a godly mind. Don’t allow the flesh to have its way, and don’t allow the devil to interfere. Look to the Lord who has lifted us up from the pit of miry clay, set us on the rock, and established our goings; then, with a new song in our mouths, let’s praise God and be such a testimony that others can see Christ in us!

We look forward to seeing you on Sunday!

Psalm 40

To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.
1 I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.
2 He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.
3 And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.
4 Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.
5 Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.
6 Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not requir
7 Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me,
8 I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.
9 I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest.
10 I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation.
11 Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O LORD: let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me.
12 For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me
13 Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me: O LORD, make haste to help me.
14 Let them be ashamed and confounded together that seek after my soul to destroy it; let them be driven backward and put to shame that wish me evil.
15 Let them be desolate for a reward of their shame that say unto me, Aha, aha.
16 Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: let such as love thy salvation say continually, The LORD be magnified.
17 But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me: thou art my help and my deliverer; make no tarrying, O my God.