

## **“Strange Days Indeed”**

By Rev. John King

*“Nobody told me there’d be days like these. Strange days indeed.”* – John Lennon

Our lives have been shaken and turned upside down by the coronavirus COVID-19.

Nobody told me there’d be a day when I told people to stay away from church.

Nobody told me there’d be a day I as pastor would face the decision to cancel Holy Week and Easter services. Strange days indeed.

But we, along with nearly every other religious organization around, have to make these decisions. We do not make them lightly. These are some of the data that shape our decisions:

1. Indications are that COVID 19 is twenty times more deadly than the flu and twice as contagious. That, combined with the fact that we have no vaccine and virtually no immunity, make this a dangerous situation of proportions unprecedented in our lifetime.
2. Our governor has issued a “stay at-home” order, effective throughout the state. Our UCC denominational leaders have issued “strong recommendations” that in-person worship be suspended in all houses of prayer.
3. Some are saying that Easter might be a beautiful time to end this social distancing thing. Indeed, it would. It could also be extremely reckless and harmful to the point of being immoral.

### **A MORAL Choice**

We’ve heard of the vulnerable population - those who are up in years or have a compromised immune system. Maybe that description applies to you, maybe not. Either way, if you have a conscience, you want to make sure that we do not become carriers of a virulent and deadly virus. Tens of thousands of people will die, perhaps more, if this virus overwhelms the capacity of hospitals. It is on path to do so. Recklessness in this regard can cause catastrophic harm. I don’t think that is Jesus’ way.

An hour before I began to write this article I read news stories about some churches that decided to continue to gather on Easter. They think it is an act of faith. It is not. It is a dangerous act of inconsiderate self-indulgence. By continuing to gather, they put all of our vulnerable family and friends at risk.

We are not merely changing our behavior to avoid becoming infected. We change our behavior to avoid hurting others.

### **A DIFFICULT Choice**

Ohio's "stay at home" order is in effect until April 6. If things then change and larger gatherings of people are once again encouraged, then we will notify everyone as soon as possible. But for the time being, all in-person Sunday services and all Holy Week and Easter Services are cancelled. Online options will be available. Please see another article for more information on how to livestream services. We are not cancelling Easter. We are gathering for Easter in a different way than before, in order to care for one another.

This is indeed a difficult choice for me and for our Church Council, one of the hardest choices I have faced in ministry. We make these choices based on the best recommendations of science and the good leadership of the governor of the state of Ohio.

Oddly, we cancel our church services to live out Jesus' teachings. Perhaps the best way to "love your neighbor" these days is to avoid killing them.

Jesus chose to make the ultimate sacrifice for us on the cross. He did that for our salvation. By comparison, the sacrifices we are being asked to make in response to this pandemic are relatively small. But make no mistake. We make our sacrifices in order that others may be saved.

We are unlikely to know how many will die because of our reckless choices, nor how many will live because of our responsible choices. But in these "strange days indeed" choosing the safest, most responsible path, is perhaps the most effective way we can live out Jesus' commandments, *that we love one another*.