CHRIST-IS who we need

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“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as it the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” – Acts 16:9

In recent weeks, many churches in the world have closed their doors and stopped services in response to their government’s appeal of no religious gatherings to prevent the spread of COVID-19. And it is no different here in Cambodia; all religious meetings in churches are likewise prohibited.

Because of church closures, some Christians are questioning the action of our leaders, claiming that this act is evidence of our lack of principle and faith. Others, however, believe that this is a socially responsible thing to do at this time of world crisis. “Should Christians continue to meet in churches” is a question where there is no concrete answer for now.

Yet, our current situation may allow us to reflect on what it truly means to assemble ourselves. Does going to a physical building prevent us from worshipping God, stirring up love, and doing good works? Maybe, God wants us to go back to the practices of the early Christians during the time of persecution. They seldom met in large groups. They worshipped God, exhorted one another and served others in small groups at home. And this was very effective in their spiritual growth and the growth of the church. Remember that in times of CRISIS, CHRIST IS who we need to be spiritually fit.

In this challenging situation, we should pray to God to open our eyes, to see creative ways of worshiping and serving Him, and to minister to others without challenging the orders of the government or our leaders for this is not the time for this. God may be calling us this time to build up our spiritual muscles, that we may be ready to reach out to people through methods within our reach, such as our phones, social media, and other means of modern communication. This is a time for united prayer wherever we are, a time of self-reflection in terms of our relationship with God, and the time of helping people responsibly.

In this world crisis, people are primarily concerned about self-preservation. Helping people who are sick, visiting the needy and being of service to others, is a thing that many feel hesitant to do today, especially that news about frontline workers dying to save the victims of COVID-19, is spread. As Christians, we are to remember that in this CRISIS, CHRIST IS the gift we can give others.

In my mission field, students in the dormitory were sent home to stay with their families. After being so occupied for the past two weeks, as the new Female home dean, I was suddenly left without much to do. However, God was not slow in filling up my time and schedule. He called us—the volunteers in Butterfly paradise—to focus on the orphanage kids. Hence, the next two weeks were spent reaching out to the orphanage kids: doing varied activities with them from praise and worship to teaching and facilitating fun games. Being with them allowed me to witness and understand their different idiosyncrasies and needs. I have realized that without God’s love in my heart, loving them would not come naturally. God also granted me this time the gift of language learning that would have been quite hard to fit in a regular schedule. These days, I normally spend an hour of Khmer classes in the afternoon, from two of my K-11 students in exchange for a Filipino language class for one of them.

Despite the letter circulated among the churches here in Siem Reap regarding worship restrictions, volunteers in Butterfly Paradise continued to gather in a small group. We have united prayer every morning, Sabbath worship outside of the church, Sabbath School class, and choir practice. Together with a small team, I was able to visit a village near the town church on Sabbath afternoons to bring the health message to the villagers. Although we are not allowed to gather people for any religious activities, we are not prohibited to serve them through health lectures, water therapy sessions, massage, and other health-related activities. Indeed, COVID-19 is very timely for us to share God’s message of health to the people.

Worshipping God and serving Him is not limited inside the church. God is everywhere and His presence is not limited to a church building. He knows our hearts and our intentions. And it pleases Him so much if our motivations to worship and serve Him reflect His purposes and His will.

Please pray for our small team trying to reach out to a village near the town church through the health message. We pray that we can expand the area of our visitation in the future, and reach out to more people in creative ways to breakdown their fears about COVID-19 and their personal biases toward Christianity especially in this time of crisis. We pray that God will also give me the means to make some hand-made face masks and hand sanitizers that can be distributed to them, and show them that God cares through His missionaries.