

" 'All things are lawful,' but not all things are beneficial. 'All things are lawful,' but not all things build up. Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other."

- 1 Corinthians 10:23-24

Dear Calvin Family,

Many years ago, those words above were written by the Apostle Paul to the church in the Roman city of Corinth. He wrote them as he was addressing some divisions that were happening in the church over the specific issue of eating food together that had been previously been sacrificed to idols. Some in the church were saying that since there is only one God, an idol is nothing so they were free to eat. Others however, because of the particulars of their experience, were unable in good conscience to eat that food. (You can read Paul's longer discussion of this in chapters 8-10 of 1 Corinthians.) Some were saying, "we are free in Christ to eat, so let's eat" while others' ability to worship in good conscience was being limited, and even harmed, by this. For Paul, the fundamental concern was not who was right and who was wrong, or even what anyone was *free* to do. Rather, Paul's concern was that Christians first and foremost respond with what love for others *called and invited* them to do.

There is an analogy here to where we potentially find ourselves as we head into the summer (and not just "we" as Calvin Presbyterian Church, but "we" as in the broader Church here in the U.S.). Most have been able to be vaccinated; but some have not. Current CDC guidelines indicated that most who are vaccinated are fine to go without masks and resume most, if not all, pre-pandemic activities, but some are not.

As Calvin Presbyterian Church seeks to chart a path forward as it pertains to our own guidelines and policies for such things as gathering for worship and fellowship, masks, singing, and so on, Paul's ancient advice to – and concern *for* - this early church can serve as a model and a way to help us think through, if not the specifics of our particular circumstances, at least some of what's at stake for a church community.

The danger for us as we navigate, explore, and create 're-opening' guidelines and policies for our church and our churches, is that in exercising what most of us are free to do, we will leave behind those of us who are not yet free to do such things, even placing an added burden on others' conscience that limits our ability to be a place where all are welcome.

That's the danger. *But the possibility*...the possibility that is behind and under and in Paul's concern, and the possibility that presents itself to us in our time, is that this would be an opportunity to grow together as a community of faith – growing in deeper and new ways to love one another; growing in ways that that further proclaim the love of Christ to and for one another.

Practically speaking, some of us will feel we are moving too slow in how we 'open up' (whether regarding masks, singing, spacing, etc). Others of us will take a little longer and perhaps feel we are moving too quickly. This can be frustrating (and certainly, if you have concerns, please let us know). My prayer is that we can go forward in a way that gives hearing to our call to be a community formed together by what is beneficial and what builds up, rather than just what is permissible. And in this way, model and embody the love of Christ.

We may not get every decision 'right.' But what we can and should commit to do, is begin here and with this as our goal: to seek what is beneficial, and what builds up; not just for some, but for all who are our sisters and brothers.

Grace and Peace,
Pastor Kevin