

**Small Talk – April 26 2021**  
**Required Facial Covering When in Public – Day 276**  
**By Michael Small**

It was 1925 – some were experiencing “the roaring twenties”. The world was recovering from a catastrophic “World War” with an unjust “peace” settlement that would plant the seeds for oppression, economic failure, a worldwide depression, and another worldwide war within a generation. Though some lived with the illusion of non-ending prosperity and unending peace, the poet T.S. Elliot, from his experience lifted another perspective in the end of his fifth stanza of the haunting poem – *The Hollow Men*. (To read the complete, dark, reflective poem go to <https://allpoetry.com/the-hollow-men>)

*This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
Not with a bang but a whimper*

When in March of 2020 the church closed its doors with the signage “*The Church has left the building to do ministry in the world*” little did we think that those doors would not reopen in many places of worship for no less than a year. Some are still closed. For the essential work and task of church was to keep people safe, healthy, and fit – spiritually and physically. In the meantime, we found new ways to do church.

And then, we begin to reimagine that first service when we would come back together in-person, in our buildings. Our fantasy was that it would be Easter, Christmas, and the Fourth of July all rolled up together. It would be a magnificent celebration with trumpets blaring. Little did we know that this pandemic would not be like a light switch, you turn it off, and then you turn it back on.

No – in a sense “This is the way the church will re-open, not with a bang – but a whimper”. That may seem harsh, but there was some truth to it for Community Church of Walker United Church of Christ, worshiping indoors for the first time since March 8, 2020. The thirty-five people in attendance were asked, “How many of you are two or more weeks beyond your last vaccination shot?” All thirty-five persons who were gathered, joyfully raised their hands. There were no hymns, but special music. There were fewer prayers, but we were prayerful. And I do not doubt for a moment that during the short service, most felt a tear form, falling upon our cheeks. We had worshiped in joy and gratitude!

It was not a “whimper” but there was a sweetness to coming together – masked and distanced. We could look into one another’s eyes, hear their voices, engage in conversation, knowing that we were safe, and we were back together. There was laughter, joy, and applause.

As we move through and learn to live with this pandemic – and then coming out of it – I hope we emerge with a sweetness. It will be a little like that newborn child seeing the world for the first time, seeing, and moving fingers and arms. It will be like that child who first begin to dare to try to walk. Sometimes we will stand strong and proud, other times we will flail arms and legs, and we will fall and maybe shed a tear. But we will get stronger. We will mature once again. And we will make choices to be better, to appreciate life, to love, and to forgive, to be kinder and gentle with one another.

Still, we will seek to be safe and keep others safe. Still, we will be careful about indoor gatherings. Still, we will wear masks when needed. Still, we will take those first steps. And hopefully, all who are able will be vaccinated ASAP and that we will stand in solidarity to keep safe the world and save the people of the world. “This is how the pandemic will end, not with a bang, but with a whimper, a tear, a cry, a cry that emerges from grief, a cry that will be transformed into new life and joy?”

In the spirit and agape love of Jesus, Michael

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