

May 30, 2020

Shavuot 2020 – What A Long Strange Trip Its Been

This marks the seventh week, the Seventh Shabbat of our Counting of the Omer a time of Scriptural significance and importance. Primarily centered around Israel's proximity to the land and their relationship with Adonai, beginning with Ha Bikkurim during the Passover Season...

Lev 23:10 "Tell the people of Isra'el, 'After you enter the land I am giving you and harvest its ripe crops, you are to bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the cohen.

Lev 23:11 He is to wave the sheaf before Adonai, so that you will be accepted; the cohen is to wave it on the day after the Shabbat.

Lev 23:15 " 'From the day after the day of rest — that is, from the day you bring the sheaf for waving — you are to count seven full weeks,

Lev 23:16 until the day after the seventh week; you are to count fifty days; and then you are to present a new grain offering to Adonai.

Yet, Adonai would reveal to us at an appointed time in the future just how significant this moad (appointed time) would actually be.

We would witness an instruction “to count” that would transcend the harvest in that we are not in the land and for centuries Israel was not in the land either. When we count, beginning with the day after Shabbat on Ha Bikkurim, we are in reality memorialising the moments that transpired on Ha Bikkurim. Namely,

- Yeshua's resurrection
- Yeshua making atonement on Ha Bikkurim in the Temple not made by human hands.

If you are not sure what I am talking about, read Yochanan (John) 20 and Hebrew 9 and I pray that Adonai reveal to you what He did to me. I have shared this many times prior.

Each day we count, we are counting the days of the resurrection. We are counting the days Yeshua accomplished the first part of his mission...

Heb 9:27 Just as human beings have to die once, but after this comes judgment,

Heb 9:28 so also the Messiah, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to deliver those who are eagerly waiting for him.

During this time, we would witness Yeshua revealing Adonai's truth to His talmidim...

Luk 24:44 Yeshua said to them, "This is what I meant when I was still with you and told you that everything written about me in the Torah of Moshe, the Prophets and the Psalms had to be fulfilled."

Luk 24:45 Then he opened their minds, so that they could understand the Tanakh,

Luk 24:46 telling them, "Here is what it says: the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day;

Luk 24:47 and in his name repentance leading to forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed to people from all nations, starting with Yerushalayim.

Luk 24:48 You are witnesses of these things.

Preparing them, making them ready to share the Good News of Adonai, that through Yeshua, Israel and the world would be redeemed so long as they put their trust in whom Adonai had sent.

Through the counting of the Omer, we would memorialise Yeshua promise

Act 1:6 When they were together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore self-rule to Isra'el?"

Act 1:7 He answered, "You don't need to know the dates or the times; the Father has kept these under his own authority.

Act 1:8 But you will receive power when the Ruach HaKodesh comes upon you; you will be my witnesses both in Yerushalayim and in all Y'hudah and Shomron, indeed to the ends of the earth!"

and His ascension...

Act 1:9 After saying this, he was taken up before their eyes; and a cloud hid him from their sight.

Act 1:10 As they were staring into the sky after him, suddenly they saw two men dressed in white standing next to them.

Then we would wait 10 days, not like the days of Awe where there was a heaviness in that Yom Kippur was approaching, but an anticipation as to what that promise would be..."we would receive Power when the Ruach Ha Kodesh comes upon you"

What did Yeshua mean by that?

We would only have to wait 10 days to find out.

Time is a funny thing. Its duration is fixed. 1 hour has 60 minutes. No more, no less. Yet it is the perspective of our situations that give the appearance of time moving quickly or as slow as molasses.

In anticipation this perspective can run either way. Usually our eagerness towards something and our desire for it to happen, usually offers the appearance of time moving slowly because our desire is to receive what we desire, yet we must wait patiently for time to methodically wind down.

Act 2:1 The festival of Shavu`ot arrived, and the believers all gathered together in one place.

Act 2:2 Suddenly there came a sound from the sky like the roar of a violent wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

Act 2:3 Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire, which separated and came to rest on each one of them.

Act 2:4 They were all filled with the Ruach HaKodesh and began to talk in different languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

This is the promise made by Yeshua and would be received upon Shavuot, not a day sooner, not a day later. A moad, an appointed time.

Yeshua offered a glimpse into the future when He was still with them of what his talmidim and others would come to experience...

Joh 14:12 Yes, indeed! I tell you that whoever trusts in me will also do the works I do! Indeed, he will do greater ones, because I am going to the Father.

Joh 14:13 In fact, whatever you ask for in my name, I will do; so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

Joh 14:14 If you ask me for something in my name, I will do it.

I lay all this before you as we have reached our destination. We have counted seven Shabbat, 49 days, where the next day is Shavuot. However, this year's counting has been anything but typical. As a congregation, this is our

10th Omer and the circumstances surrounding it offer no comparison.

Taking a page from our Passover Haggadah, I will ask and answer:

Why is this Shavuot different from all others?

As I was considering what this year's Shavuot sermon would focus on, I was reminded of these lyrics...

*Sometimes the lights all shinin on me;
Other times I can barely see.
Lately it occurs to me what a long, strange trip its been.*

These lyrics are from the Grateful Dead song "Truckin" and refer to a drug raid of the band's hotel lodgings in New Orleans during a concert tour earlier in 1970:

Yet the words that would not escape my thoughts "*what a long, strange trip its been*"

There have been times when I had thought we had "gone through the looking glass"

That is...where things were contrary to the real world, that is where things are not as they should be".

Talk of "the new normal" and terms such as "social distancing" have permeated, that is they have spread through our culture and taken root. To where this year Omer has been memorialised in a much different way.

Yes we have counted.

Yes we have arrived at our appointed time.

Yet, these 49 days have dragged on, and on, and on...to where it feels like ages have passed.

For our congregation and in relation to the events that have surrounded us, our Omer, our counting actually began March 15th. The ides of March for any of you who have had a flashback to your high school days and your required Shakespearean reading assignment of Julius Caesar is the 74th day on the Roman calendar. This day sealed the fate of Caesar, and would become a day where we would begin counting the days we have been separated as a congregation.

Unlike Caesar, our fate is sealed by the promise of Adonai, nothing else.

Rom 8:38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers, neither what exists nor what is coming,

Rom 8:39 neither powers above nor powers below, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God which comes to us through the Messiah Yeshua, our Lord.

Yet, at the time, on March 14th I had conveyed something that we have experienced for eight previous years...The School's open house. A Shabbat we would not be able to use the gym. That day was our Purim celebration where we had a great time, not knowing it would be our last gathering for some time.

The talk of 15 days of voluntary isolation started to hit the airwaves. The directive from the Whitehouse was "15 days to flatten the curve" The states latched on to this aspect. So when March 21st rolled around, it was no big deal for us, in that we had already factored in not meeting.

Then on March 24th the Governor outlines what are considered to be essential business for which congregations

were not considered to be. This would be followed by a March 31st executive order to “stay at home” Effective April 2nd, this would continue until April 30th.

<https://www.maine.gov/governor/mills/news/governor-mills-issues-stay-healthy-home-mandate-2020-03-31>

The original 15 days to “flatten the curve” have been extended 30 additional days to 45 in total.

At this time, we were counting the days to Passover. The actual day was April 8th and our Seder was to be on that Shabbat April 11th. Hopes of the executive order being shortened had fallen by the wayside. After a few emailed sermons, we would take the plunge and began meeting online through Webex. Our first Webex gathering was on April 8th for Passover.

As each day passed by at a snail's pace, we were challenged to actually remember what day it was. Routines disrupted, continuity of one's daily life interrupted, many have been confronted by other challenges as a result of isolation.

Through the month of April we adapted but were growing increasingly frustrated that individual rights to assemble and express our faith have been denied by a unilateral executive order that flies directly in the face of the constitution while in contrast those establishments that were deemed essential were able to operate with some modifications.

We were deemed to be non-essential. Your faith was non-essential in the eyes of the Government. We could not be trusted to act responsibly. The passivity of church leadership and organisations such as Maine Council of Churches and the Christian Civic League of Maine to not publicly challenge these actions lead many parishioners to question their role.

Where on May 4th (day 23 of the Omer and day 51 since our last service) a letter was nailed to the virtual door of church leaders in the Portland area expressing the concerns of a body of Messiah that was silent. (letter and response below)

A review of the constitution, a contextual perspective of Maine's impacted status of Covid 19 in relation to other states and thus the excessive executive response not to mention a couple of historical quotes would fall on deaf ears. Not one positive response. Not one leader expressing similar concerns. Not one leader taking history into account.

Benjamin Franklin once said: "Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety."

Instead, I received the following...

“Please do not ever send another email to this email address and do not reply to this email. I will make sure further emails from you are blocked. Have better luck with right-wing Christian fundamentalists and evangelicals waiting for the Rapture. We are none of those things.”

“Thank you for your thoughtful letter. I am, however, disappointed by its contents. For those of us who are committed to follow the way of Jesus, something different is expected of us.”

“If we had no way to gather, perhaps we would join you in this effort. Our data shows that instead of our 80-120 attendance on Sunday mornings, we now have as many as 3,500 interactions a week through our 6 days of online

daily devotions, our online service and our nightly connections on Zoom. Our small groups continue to meet online as well.”

That was May 4th - 9th

We are now at May 30th. With the restriction to meet being lifted but with other restrictions, we are still challenged.

Today may be day 49 of the omer, but it is also day 77 since we last gathered together as a congregation. That would be 11 Shabbats.

And yet, on day 49 / 77 we are now confronted with another matter. Since Wednesday and the tragic death of George Floyd in Minnesota the country has been challenged yet again, yet now to a point where its already strained nerves are exploding. If I could use one word to describe what I saw it was RAGE. On Friday night riots were seen in places outside of Minnesota – Atlanta, Cincinnati, Brooklyn, Denver Washington where the White House was on lockdown. Divergent places not directly impacted by this death, yet have exploded in rage. This stopped being about George Floyd when riots, looting and destruction of property began.

The first amendment right that we are afforded reads as follows:

Article 1: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Affords us the right to assemble and peaceably protest. Yet what has transpired over the last three days is anything but. Rioting and looting are not a response to George Floyd, but a response to the pent up frustration and anger of a people whose rights have been suppressed.

Over these past 77 days we have seen two diametrically opposed positions taking root. Two aspects that cannot be sustained when both are seeking to devour the space of the other. Each seeking the oxygen of power and control when only one can truly survive.

I am talking about Lawlessness and Authoritarianism.

Lawlessness = anarchy (a state of disorder due to absence or nonrecognition of authority.)

The antithesis of an anarchist would be someone who favours a corporate-run state headed by an absolute monarch or dictator.

This would be...

Authoritarianism = the enforcement or advocacy of strict obedience to authority at the expense of personal freedom.

Liberties...what liberties?

In these diametrically opposed worlds there is one reality that exists. The absence of Liberty. Without law there is no liberty to live. Lawlessness is the order. Without rule of law, there are no boundaries. When authoritarianism is in charge it is at the expense of one's liberties.

Rom 7:7 Therefore, what are we to say? That the Torah is sinful? Heaven forbid! Rather, the function of the

Torah was that without it, I would not have known what sin is. For example, I would not have become conscious of what greed is if the Torah had not said, "Thou shalt not covet."

Without law, anything goes. There is no structure in the throws of Lawlessness as you have likely witnessed through the looting of stores and the destruction of property.

After this year's Passover many made the observation towards its similarities to the Passover 3000 years ago whereby we observed it in our homes rather than celebrating it together. Additionally, I have heard people talking about a heightened expectation of an Acts 2 moment as I shared with you previously whereby Adonai again pours out His Spirit and a revival ensues.

My reading of that scenario is different. Keeping in mind anything is possible and Adonai could answer the prayers of many for revival and restoration, we are still on the 49th day. I will rejoice if He does.

However, there is one major distinction when relating Passover 2020 with Passover 3000+ years ago. And it is this...

Adonai instructed His people to stay in their homes, protecting them from the 10th and final plague, death of the firstborn. This contrasts significantly from today. This year, we were instructed to stay in our homes, not by Adonai, but by man. This is an enormous distinction. As such, the expectation conveyed by some in the church of a revival I believe runs contrary to what Scripture says about this time.

Isa 5:20 Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who change darkness into light and light into darkness, who change bitter into sweet and sweet into bitter!

This is the time we are living in right now. That which is not moral has become legal in the eyes of Adonai's creation. Likewise that which is good in the eyes of Adonai is being threatened by His creation.

So, how should we view these times?

What is said about these times in Scripture?

Sha'ul conveys the following to Timothy...

2Ti 3:1 Moreover, understand this: in the acharit-hayamim (the end of days) will come trying times.

2Ti 3:2 People will be self-loving, money-loving, proud, arrogant, insulting, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy,

2Ti 3:3 heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, uncontrolled, brutal, hateful of good,

2Ti 3:4 traitorous, headstrong, swollen with conceit, loving pleasure rather than God,

2Ti 3:5 as they retain the outer form of religion but deny its power. Stay away from these people!

Sha'ul conveys that we are to stay away from these people. This is a warning against those who are within the Body of Messiah.

Kefa conveys the following in his second letter, where in the second chapter He structures an impactful warning to believers regarding false teachers and prophets. Ones who tell you what is pleasing to your ears...

Yet what is the result...

2Pe 2:18 Mouthing grandiosities of nothingness, they play on the desires of the old nature, in order to seduce with debaucheries people who have just begun to escape from those whose way of life is wrong.

2Pe 2:19 They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption; for a person is slave to whatever has defeated him.

2Pe 2:20 Indeed, if they have once escaped the pollutions of the world through knowing our Lord and Deliverer, Yeshua the Messiah, and then have again become entangled and defeated by them, their latter condition has become worse than their former.

Again a warning for believers and about believers.

This sermon has been a stark reality check rather than a puffy sugar coated, feel good message.

We are instructed when flying on a plane that in the event of loss of cabin pressure we are to place the breathing masks on ourselves first and then assist others.

Therefore we need to make certain we are deeply breathing in the breath of life before we can assist others.

As such, I need to hammer these words of Sha'ul into you...over and over, in preparation for the time we are in. You need to remain sober, prepared and diligent

Rom 12:1 I exhort you, therefore, brothers, in view of God's mercies, to offer yourselves as a sacrifice, living and set apart for God. This will please him; it is the logical "Temple worship" for you.

Rom 12:2 In other words, do not let yourselves be conformed to the standards of the `olam hazeh. Instead, keep letting yourselves be transformed by the renewing of your minds; so that you will know what God wants and will agree that what he wants is good, satisfying and able to succeed.

And Sha'ul's warning to Timothy...

2Ti 4:1 I solemnly charge you before God and the Messiah Yeshua, who will judge the living and the dead when he appears and establishes his Kingdom:

2Ti 4:2 proclaim the Word! Be on hand with it whether the time seems right or not. Convict, censure and exhort with unfailing patience and with teaching.

2Ti 4:3 For the time is coming when people will not have patience for sound teaching, but will cater to their passions and gather around themselves teachers who say whatever their ears itch to hear.

2Ti 4:4 Yes, they will stop listening to the truth, but will turn aside to follow myths.

2Ti 4:5 But you, remain steady in every situation, endure suffering, do the work that a proclaimer of the Good News should, and do everything your service to God requires.

So, over these last 49 / 77 days I can say...

What a long, strange trip its been...and it continues on.

Kehilah Portland



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May 4, 2020

An Open Letter to Maine's Ministers:

The symbolism and imagery are not lost on me as I write this letter to Maine's ministers dated May 4th, also known as Star Wars day. A series of three trilogies following the perils, comprising both victory and defeat of the characters as the inherent battle of good vs. evil plays out. The Empire is determined to rule the universe establishing a tyrannical, overreaching and authoritarian government while the Rebellion looks to defeat these overlords.

The actions of Governor Mills in response to Covid-19 through her executive orders have placed churches and synagogues in a position to where they have been identified as "non-essential" have likely exceeded our constitutional rights and their governing authority.

Here are two responses to these executive orders by Maine Council of Churches and Christian Civic League of Maine.

Response by Maine Council of Churches - <http://mainecouncilofchurches.org/2020/04/an-open-letter-to-governor-janet-mills-and-dr-nirav-shah-and-to-maines-churches-and-the-clergy-who-serve-them/>

Response by Christian Civic League of Maine - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7p5gT5uQDjg&t=522s>

My first question to you – Are you satisfied by these responses?

Second – Are our constitutional rights being violated?

In one response they use the word "temporary" as being viable so long as congregations are treated in the same manner as other organizations. There is one problem with this assessment – The Constitution. Unlike other organizations, which are not specifically referred to in the Constitution, religious organizations are.

Article 1: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

The government is not permitted to create a "state" religion. Likewise, they are not permitted to prevent the expression of religion, nor its assembly regardless of circumstance. How does this relate to Governor Mills and her executive order? Article 10 conveys the following:

Article 10: The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.

That which the Federal Government has not addressed is left for the states to determine. Considering that the first amendment of the constitution addresses our rights as they pertain to our expression of religion, the State can not impede upon those rights. Yet this has not prevented our Governor from exercising unconstitutional action through her executive orders and the emergency powers granted to her by the state legislature..

Maine residents are being treated in a similar manner as other states where there is a far greater outbreak of Covid-19

Counties with positive cases as of May 1st:

- [λ](#) Androscoggin: 52 cases; 2 deaths; 27 recovered
- [λ](#) Aroostook: 5 cases; 3 recovered
- [λ](#) Cumberland: 504 cases; 27 deaths; 293 recovered
- [λ](#) Franklin: 28 cases; 1 death; 12 recovered
- [λ](#) Hancock: 10 cases; 8 recovered
- [λ](#) Kennebec: 104 cases; 6 deaths; 39 recovered
- [λ](#) Knox: 16 cases; 13 recovered
- [λ](#) Lincoln: 14 cases; 10 recovered
- [λ](#) Oxford: 15 cases; 12 recovered
- [λ](#) Penobscot: 79 cases; 43 recovered
- [λ](#) Piscataquis: 1 case; 1 recovered
- [λ](#) Sagadahoc: 19 cases; 13 recovered
- [λ](#) Somerset: 17 cases; 14 recovered
- [λ](#) Waldo: 49 cases; 12 deaths; 24 recovered
- [λ](#) Washington: 2 cases; 2 recovered
- [λ](#) York: 208 cases; 7 deaths; 143 recovered

<https://www.livescience.com/maine-coronavirus-updates.html>

Only three counties have more than 100 identified cases in total, yet minimizing the current number of active cases numbering only 411 (recoveries = 657; Deaths = 55) throughout the entire state. Yet given this information, the stay at home order for the entire state has been extended indefinitely. This includes restrictions remaining on religious services.

Cumberland County, the most impacted has a current infection rate of 0.17% (504 cases out of 295,000 residents). Whereas the infection rate for New Jersey is 1.43% (127,438 cases / 8.89 million people), over 8 times the rate of infection.

Consider population density (one of the factors associated with prompting the spread of Covid-19) for the entire state of Maine in relation to New York City and New Jersey, the two hardest hit areas of our country.

- [λ](#) New York City – 27,759 people / square mile (8.4 million people / 302.6 square miles)
- [λ](#) New Jersey - 1,018 people / square mile (8.89 million people / 8,729 square miles)
- [λ](#) Maine - 38 people / square mile (1.344 million people / 35,385 square miles)

The geographic dynamics are not even close to being similar, yet the response by our governor is a shutdown of similar proportion. Yet, our governor will not provide substantiation in how these conclusions were determined. Her justification recently is our proximity to Boston, where there have been to date a total of 13,777 confirmed cases.

There is no precedent for the actions that have been taken. The action of quarantining the healthy as well as those at risk or infected has never happened before. Whether it was the Spanish Flu, Tuberculosis or H1N1, only those infected were quarantined from the general population. My grandmother on my mother's side developed Tuberculosis in 1948 and was committed to an asylum where she would spend two years until her death from the disease. These restrictions today are unprecedented.

Benjamin Franklin once said: "Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety." That quote often comes up in the context of new technology and concerns about government surveillance. Today, I am bringing it up because again I ask, are you satisfied with the response by church organizations?

I have been contacted by people, congregants of various congregations who have interacted with us over the years and ask this very question.

This is not just a letter ranting about our God given rights being infringed upon by a state government where the word "temporary" is nowhere to be found in our constitution as a means of justifying such action. Each of you who are reading this letter shepherd your congregation. If your congregants are like mine, some are greatly struggling from this imposed and restrictive order preventing us from gathering. Deemed as being a non-essential service by the Government, did not consult our congregants. To them, we are essential. Our faith is essential and as such provides greatly needed interaction. We identify our congregation as a mishpocha, Hebrew meaning family.

Is history repeating itself?

What do I mean by this?

Consider Germany of the 1930's. Rights of the Jewish people were greatly restricted, thus leading to the atrocity of the Holocaust. Consider reading the progressive manner by which rights were removed.

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/antisemitic-legislation-1933-1939>

Is there a parallel today?

Consider the last two months. The narrative first was about social distancing and 15 days. Next, the 15 days were extended an additional 30 day (totaling 45). It was during this time when the executive order restricting gatherings was imposed. The initial intent was to flatten the curve. Now the narrative includes "defeating the virus". Further, some are saying we can't fully open until we have either a vaccine, nationwide testing and/or contact tracing. The executive order restricting gatherings was extended, with no specific end. The goal posts are being moved. Yet, is anyone noticing.

In a recent article by the Editorial board of *Issues and Insights* in response to New York Governor Cuomo's current response.

"The fact is that the lockdowns weren't about stopping the spread of the disease. Their justification was to slow the spread so our health care system wasn't overwhelmed. And Cuomo should know that even in his home state there's little evidence that the health care system was even close to being inundated."

<https://issuesinsights.com/2020/05/04/Cuomo-Plays-On-Fears-And-Ignorance-About-Reopening-The-Economy/>

The threat to Maine's healthcare system being overwhelmed is negligible. Yet the narrative has changed. Attached are a summary of actions by our governor from *Maine People Before Politics*.

Consider this article from Western Journal entitled "Kansas City Now Allows Religious Gatherings, But Requires 'Records of All Attendees'"

https://www.westernjournal.com/kansas-city-now-allows-religious-gatherings-requires-records-attendees/?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=conservativetribune&utm_content=2020-05-03&utm_campaign=manualpost

The voice of the church largely remained silent during the Nazi party's tyrannical reign. The Lutheran church comprised 99% of the German Christian population.

I am reminded of the following work composed in 1946 by the German [Lutheran](#) pastor [Martin Niemöller](#) (1892–1984)

First they came for the Communists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Communist

Then they came for the Socialists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Socialist

Then they came for the trade unionists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a trade unionist

Then they came for the Jews
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Jew

Then they came for me
And there was no one left
To speak out for me

If we don't speak up, will anyone speak up for us? To this point, the responses of Maine Council of Churches and The Christian Civic League of Maine are politically correct, yet greatly lacking in voicing our rights. The "goal posts" have moved recently. Who is to say they won't continue to move, further isolating and separating the body of Messiah.

Is there a solution?

The concept I would like to introduce you to is the following: **The Maine Ministers Alliance.**

- An alliance of congregation leaders speaking as one voice through the wisdom of Scripture.

2Ti 3:14 But you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, recalling the people from whom you learned it;

2Ti 3:15 and recalling too how from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which can give you the wisdom that leads to deliverance through trusting in Yeshua the Messiah.

2Ti 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is **valuable for teaching the truth, convicting of sin, correcting faults and training in right living;**

2Ti 3:17 **thus anyone who belongs to God may be fully equipped for every good work.**

Pro 15:31 He who heeds life-giving correction will be at home in the company of the wise.

Israel was blessed at Sinai to hear the audible voice of God.

Deu 4:36 From heaven he caused you to hear his voice, in order to instruct you; and on earth he caused you to see his great fire; and you heard his very words coming out from the fire.

And now, we have the Ruach Ha Kodesh residing in us...

Joh 16:13 However, when the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own initiative but will say only what he hears. He will also announce to you the events of the future.

Joh 16:14 He will glorify me, because he will receive from what is mine and announce it to you.

In that the Ruach Ha Kodesh (The Holy Spirit) will glorify Yeshua, what would He be saying and doing at this moment?

- An Alliance providing a voice for congregations.

So, today, I am planting a seed that the shepherds of the body of Messiah come together as one voice, speaking out against the overreach of government towards our religious liberties. Once this pandemic subsides I don't believe our challenges as the body of Messiah will subside either. I see this as a trial balloon by the government to see how far they can go before we respond. The more we remain silent the more we are in jeopardy of losing our constitutional rights. Justified actions with little resistance.

Are you frustrated with the response (or lack thereof) of religious leadership?

Are you angry with the overreach of our governor's executive orders?

Are you concerned for your congregants and the impact of isolation it is having?

Maine is lacking a Minister's Alliance. We need to begin this dialog now. Respond to this email if you are interested in participating.

Thank you for your time and consideration as you prayerfully consider everything conveyed.

Stephen Luft
Messianic Rabbi – Kehilah Portland Messianic Jewish Synagogue

Responses from Letter to Maine's Pastors...

Response 1:

Please do not ever send another email to this email address and do not reply to this email. I will make sure further emails from you are blocked. Have better luck with right-wing Christian fundamentalists and evangelicals waiting for the Rapture. We are none of those things.

Response 2:

First Baptist Church in Westbrook will submit to our governmental authorities as Paul directs in Romans 13. We will be kind and work with our officials, praying that they see us as being part of the solution not part of their many frustrations.

Our ministry has not suffered at all by temporarily suspending our large group meetings. In fact, our church has become healthier through this time. We now have more people stepping up to lead studies and meetings, more people truly connecting and checking on one another and are serving more people.

If we had no way to gather, perhaps we would join you in this effort. Our data shows that instead of our 80-120 attendance on Sunday mornings, we now have as many as 3,500 interactions a week through our 6 days of

online daily devotions, our online service and our nightly connections on Zoom. Our small groups continue to meet online as well.

We are not persecuted. The essential and non-essential language was replaced with the introduction of phased reopening. Instead, it was introduced with language that focuses on the likelihood of being able to go about our "business" safely, maintaining social distancing. I urge you to be truthful and use the new language instead of making it appear to be a personal attack and inflammatory. ("She classifies religious services as 'non-essential!'" That is simply not true.)

Is school essential? They are closed and doing things online only, just like churches. It is not a judgement of essential or non-essential.

I wish my brothers and sisters would choose peace. I wish we would serve our friends and neighbors who serve in our government and are doing their best to make decisions for our welfare.

I will encourage everyone I know in ministry to lead with love and seek peace.

We will not join your fight.

Response 3:

Thank you for your thoughtful letter. I am, however, disappointed by its contents. For those of us who are committed to follow the way of Jesus, something different is expected of us.

"Don't be ashamed if you suffer as one who belongs to the Messiah. Rather, honor God as you bear the Messiah's name. Give honor to God, because it's time for judgment to begin with God's own household. But if judgment starts with us, what will happen to those who refuse to believe God's good news? If the righteous are barely rescued, what will happen to the godless and sinful? So then, those who suffer because they follow God's will should commit their lives to a trustworthy Creator by doing what is right" (1 Peter 4.16-19).

"Do everything without grumbling and arguing so that you may be blameless and pure, innocent children of God surrounded by people who are crooked and corrupt. Among these people you shine like stars in the world because you hold on to the word of life (Philippians 2.14-16).

There is no place within the people of God for complaining about our rights being taken away. What "rights" do we have in this world? And the excessive fear-mongering of your words are entirely out of place among those who trust in the providence of God. You are certainly free as a private American citizen to be concerned about such things, but these have no place within the Body of Christ. When did our Lord complain about his rights being taken away? When did the apostles set up a commission to keep the authorities accountable for their treatment of the disciples?

No, if we must suffer for a time, let us do it with gladness and joy that we have the privilege to suffer in this way, as one small way to participate in the sufferings of the Messiah. Please reconsider your work, my friend, and let us be the children of God who never grumble or complain or argue with the rest of the world.