

Pastor Sarah's Midweek Message



Dear church,

I keep wondering when “wilderness” will become an irrelevant metaphor. It’d be just fine with me if that were the case, but, sigh, we are still very much in it and are still called to live in this time as responsibly and faithfully as we can. As I write this, COVID-19 is exploding in our area. The Kane County test positivity rate has soared to 22% (compared to 13% statewide) and the ICUs in our area are about 85% full. Even though the Omicron variant is believed to be less severe, because it is so transmissible, many are getting sick and our numbers threaten the capacity of our hospital systems and staff to provide care for all who need it.

It is because of this surge and the responsibility we bear in reducing spread that **the Church Council has made the difficult decision to return to virtual worship services for the month of January.** While it’s disheartening to be here again, we believe this is the most faithful and loving choice at this time.

We will be sending out a prerecorded service every weekend. We will also offer opportunities to gather via zoom on some Sunday mornings for a brief time of prayer and reflection. Watch the Friday email blast for details on every weekend.

It is anticipated that this surge will peak toward the end of the month and then begin subsiding in February. We plan to gather again in person as soon as it is safe to do so, and we will continue to watch the metrics closely to determine when that is possible.

With worship moving online for the rest of this month, we have also made the following decisions:

- We will not have in-person Sunday School or Confirmation until we have resumed in-person worship. For the month of January, these two programs will be suspended; we will re-evaluate in February.
- We will allow small groups of up to 10 people to gather in our building, as long as masks are worn at all times and no food/drink shared.
- We will allow for in-person funeral services; we will cap attendance at 50 and enforce strict protocols.

Thanks, beloved community, for your faithfulness and flexibility in this long wilderness. The ever-changing landscape of this pandemic is tiring and confounding, and I remain so grateful for the way we, as a community, have witnessed to love's presence and power in the midst of it all. As Rev. Meta Carlson writes in the blessing below, we are "together apart" in this; together in Spirit, together in love, together in our common mission to love the world God so loves. Thank you!

Here's the full blessing written by Rev. Meta Herrick Carlson earlier this week:

*For hospital staff
and medical professionals
who work without rest,
who see what we cannot fathom,
who do not have time and space
to properly grieve their patients.*

*For researchers and scientists
who labor at light speed
to break records that save lives,
being changed with each finding
even while the rest of us decide
it's too slow or suspiciously fast.*

*For parents, educators,
and specialists of every stripe
who try with all their might
to let the little ones be kids
in the midst of this mess of
sideways grief and freedom mistaken.*

*For the store owners and artists,
retail and gig workers
who depend on a nation that
moves and mingles and feasts
together, making magic and income
when bodies are spontaneous.*

*For those who have suffered,
who have struggled to breathe,
who were invincible and then suddenly
were not, who have been laid low
and lived to tell what it means
to die and rise, to be old and new.*

*For the immunocompromised,
neighbors vulnerable and small
who feel forgotten, no longer worthy
of the care we all took at the start
when we all fought the same thing,
a collective and noble force.*

*Have mercy, O God.
Change our hearts.
Give us back to each other
for this season of life braved
together apart, a people deciding
how to be remembered.*

My deep prayer in all of this is that we will be remembered for the love that we held to in this challenging time.

As always, we welcome your questions and/or concerns. Please contact either one of us by phone or email if you wish to have further discussion about this decision.

With you in the wilderness,

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