

January Remarks from Our Pastors

In their reports to Council each month, Pastor Gregg and Pastor Rachel conclude with some personal remarks that summarize the most recent period of their leadership here at Grace.

Pastor Gregg's Remarks:

One of the readings for this coming Sunday is Psalm 36. Verses 7-9 are a helpful framework as we close out a year of ministry together, and look towards the next.

⁷*How priceless is your love, O God! All people take refuge under the shadow of your wings.*

⁸*They feast upon the abundance of your house; you give them drink from the river of your delights.*

⁹*For with you is the well of life, and in your light we see light.*

All people take refuge in the shadow of the Almighty's wings. All are fed through God's abundant house. God has a river, teeming with delightful refreshment. God is the well of all life and the one light by which we are able to see all others. Frequently in the poetry of the Psalms we feast on vivid imagery like this. The reader is not meant to understand this figurative language as literal descriptions. Rather, the reader is meant to paint a mental picture of this kind of providence. So, what does it look like to *you*?

I invite you: paint a similar picture yourself, imagine for yourself. In the past year, how has God been your *refuge*, your *sustenance*, your *refreshment*, your *life*, and your *light*? In these things, how have you felt the love of God personally?

I see God's *refuge* as the worship we were able to accomplish in the past year. Whether masked or not, Communing or not, singing or not, we most certainly proclaimed the Gospel in 2021. We grew its reach by our efforts, and I am so grateful for the support that empowered that kind of growth. I know we will continue this work in the coming year, further improving our capacity to welcome people into our worship experience, where God is encountered, both in-person and virtually.

God has *sustained* and *refreshed* me in the last year through the resilience we displayed. There weren't as many people gathered for worship, but we did not let that keep us from celebrating Word and Sacrament. Financial resources were a little less than we'd hoped, but we still finished the year strong, meeting the vast majority of the goals we established for the year. We had setbacks due to the fluctuations of the pandemic, but we got our vaccinations, took care of one another, and kept moving forward together. We had ample opportunity to pout because things were not the way we hoped they would be, but instead, we leaned into the grace of our Lord, and trusted that we would have what we needed. And we did.

God has been *life* and *light* to me through you. Whomever you are, reading this right now, in you I have seen God's life and light - your witness radiates these things abundantly. In the past year I have seen people stepping up in new ways. We have new volunteers, people willing to step outside their comfort zone and try something unfamiliar for the sake of faith. We have more people actively volunteering today than when Pr. Rachel and I first arrived. That kind of growth is stunning. You have been doing so much: painting, cleaning, repairing, replacing, singing, reading, folding, sorting, planning, discerning, praying, cooking, healing, caring, loving. You have been the visible hands and feet of Christ. For every time I might otherwise be discouraged, I have the ability to look around for the ones who are helping, who are poised to continue growing in faith together in the coming year. You are God's life and light.

The ministry we share is sometimes easy to overlook, because it becomes familiar. We run the risk of taking for granted the unique impact of God's people, drawn to this community. Go back to the Psalm and be reminded of what you are. You are a vision, a glimpse of God, who continues to uphold the world. You are the way people know

the Body of Christ is more than an idea - they see his people doing what he did. You are so clearly filled with the Holy Spirit, and empowered to make God's love tangible. God's love is priceless, indeed, because it animates people who experience that love and share it with the world.

Thank you for letting me be a part of who you are, Grace Family. I can't wait to see what we do next, trusting that in our efforts, God's light will continue to shine out for all to see, and in that light, everything else looks so much better.

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Gregg



Pastor Rachel's Remarks:

As we start the year, I'm thinking about our 2022 goals of CONNECTING, and from what I'm seeing, we're off to a great start!

On the last day of their Christmas break, six of our Youth and three adults came in to work on the Youth room refresh. Together, they prepped and painted the space, built shelving units, and talked more about the excitement they have for this room. As we worked, I heard the youth saying things like, "this looks so much more like us" and "this space will be more like ours now." Afterwards, one of our adult volunteers reflected on how nice it was to hear them talking and to work alongside them on this project.

Painting is also underway in our Nursery. After many days of work by volunteers cleaning and sorting, the space is ready for redecorating. Many people are participating in this work, and are enjoying one another's company as they create a welcoming, safe place for our youngest members.

On Sunday morning, our Council met to elect officers for 2022. The room was filled with an uplifting energy, as people stepped forward to take on leadership positions and were encouraged and supported by one another, naming gifts that connected to roles.

Sunday afternoon, the Young Youth went into the Sanctuary to talk about Baptism, and what was scheduled to be a short story time and conversation turned into the whole meeting time spent hearing thoughtful questions from our children. They asked about the paraments, the stoles the pastors wear, the crosses, the stained glass, the sanctuary candle, the dates on various items, and more. They talked about their experiences here. As they listened to each other's questions and the answers, more stories and questions bubbled up. It was a holy time to see that they are paying attention, noticing what is happening in this sacred space, and connecting with each other, this community, and their faith.

In this year, I'm looking forward to the ways we'll all be connecting with each other, this community, and our faith. I'm encouraged that these connections are already underway, and that we have the opportunity to be intentional about growing into them together. I'm hopeful that the Holy Spirit will be guiding us into connections we have not yet seen and experiences we cannot even imagine. And I hope you'll be part of these connections with us.

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Rachel