

March 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's Remarks:

...Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me...
...Salvation is Christ's May thy salvation, Lord, be always with us! Amen.

I'm writing on St. Patrick's Day, so I figure it makes sense to use some of the words attributed to him above for framing my remarks this month. In its entirety, the prayer covers more than what I have included, but this portion is probably the most familiar, and it reflects my experiences, too. In the past month I have experienced Christ – that is, the redeeming force of God – all over the place.

Experiences in worship have been Christ for me, where we are shifting to a liturgy that has long been a favorite. I love the way the proper preface has music underneath it, with undulating chords that build as it goes. What begins as an acknowledgement of this appropriate thing we are doing in worship eventually crescendos in a way that unites our experience with that of the saints of every time and place. Worship should always invite us into transcendent experiences, particularly around Communion.

Outside of the Sanctuary, Christ has been present in the way our community is slowly beginning to shake off the seclusion required from all of us during the darkest days of the pandemic. Don't get me wrong – I know Covid is still very much present with us, yet St. Patrick's words are a reminder that Christ is with us, too. In fact, Christ is present in two entirely opposite responses to Covid. Christ is present in the sacrificial love that leads some of us to forego community for the sake of the vulnerable. Christ is also present in the empathy we show for one another, acknowledging that God created humankind as a fundamentally social lifeform. We are made for community, and if we want to thrive, we *must* find ways to connect with one another, knowing that Christ is present when we gather in his name.

The gatherings on Wednesday evenings have already been a powerful, tangible expression of Christ for me. The experience of people sharing soup and holy conversation is balm for those who have felt disconnected for some time. I know not everyone is ready to share space in this way just yet, but if you are, I invite you to make this a priority. There are many reasons one of our sacraments comes to us as table fellowship, not the least of which is ability to look one another in the eye and connect at the end of the day. For those who are not yet ready to be with us indoors, I hope the coming months will afford several opportunities for outdoor connection. Let this be your invitation to claim some time to meet with me at PW's – Jesus did not have ice cream in his time on earth, but I am confident it would have figured prominently in some of his exchanges with God's people.

Lastly, please remember that although Christ is truly present in so much of our lives, we need to actively *invite* him to transform our lives. This is true for the transformation found in community, too. If you are feeling disconnected, please reach out – we are always eager for opportunities to be a closer family of faith, and journey with you, discovering the presence of Christ in the ups and downs of the life that stretches out before us.

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Gregg

Pastor's Remarks:

We are somehow already a quarter through 2022! The first quarter is a good place to check in on our year's goals of Connecting, I'd like to share with you a bit of what I've seen so far.

Connecting with Our Campus Ministry

+ For those students who were interested, WELCM Friend mentors have been established! For some other students, this semester is not a great time to add an activity, and we are hopeful that things will be less stressful for them in the fall. Part of being good partners is giving the right support, which may at times be waiting on some programming.

+ A number of WELCM students joined us for the Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper! It was wonderful to have them with us for the start of our Lenten season.

+ Thanks to the t-shirt fundraiser, more of the Grace congregation will be able to physically advertise WELCM in the community! I'm looking forward to seeing what conversations may be started from these shirts.

+ I personally had the treat of attending WELCM last week, and got to share my experience of being a woman in ministry in the ELCA with the students. Only one student who was with us was ELCA (and they are a new joiner!) and they all had such great questions about our denomination, why we do what we do, and what we believe, as well as thoughtful observations and insights. It was such a joy to spend an evening with them.

Connecting within Our Congregation

+ As Lent has begun, we've been able to have several meals together as a congregation in our Fellowship Hall. It has been so wonderful to see people gathered around tables, talking and laughing over shared food. These gatherings have included longtime members and first time visitors, and we are all learning more about one another and finding new connections.

+ Sunday School hour has become a buzzing time, with 8 classes happening! Our children's classrooms are full of kids learning about the day's gospel lesson through games and activities; if you walk down the hallway, you'll hear all kinds of happy voices as the kids delight in being together again. Our new adult class has just started as well, and we are hopeful that this offering will be well-suited to adults who are less able to attend every week, as the materials start fresh each Sunday. Seeing full classrooms has filled my heart these last few weeks.

+ The post-worship connections in the Fellowship Hall are increasing. This was something we missed right away when the pandemic began – those quick but vital opportunities to check in with old and new friends. More and more each week, I see people linger for conversation, glad to see each other and hear what's happening in their lives.

Connecting with the Mission of Christ

+ As we enter Lent, we have more opportunities than usual to gather for worship. Our in-person Ash Wednesday and Holden Evening Prayer services have been a welcome return to our worship life. I am glad to see so many people joining in worship, both in person and online, in this central part of who we are as God's people.

+ As you may have read in the enews, on Feb 20th, our young youth, youth, and supporting adults had the chance to go to HOPE and volunteer. It was awesome to see the kids learn about what HOPE does, and then actively participate in work that would immediately help their neighbors. Many of them expressed the intention of returning, as they saw the value of their work and enjoyed doing it.

+ Our first Grace Outreach Partnership Grant partnerships are coming to an end this month, and we will soon know who our next partners are. It has been rewarding to get to know more ministries in our community, and to learn from them about the needs of our neighbors and how we might be called to meet them. I'm looking forward to a new year of learning and serving together!

At the quarter mark, I feel we are making great Connecting progress. I can't wait to see what the next three quarters have in store. And I invite you to share your own stories of seeing and participating in the connections

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Rachel