

November 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:

Let's look at the Gospel text for Christ the King Sunday: John 18:33-38a. Here, Jesus faces interrogation. "Are you the King of the Jews?" asks Pilate. Jesus does not really accept the title, instead pointing out that others say so, and that his kingdom is something entirely different. Jesus continues, sharing his mission: to testify to the truth. He says those who belong to the truth listen to his voice. All of this is such a fascinating way to say he does not *need* to be a king! He is the *source* of truth - truth that will call people to itself - which means he does not need worldly power, nor wealth, nor status. He does not need accolades or influential friends. His word – truth, written so we might understand it better – is sufficient. Amid uncertainty, what could be more important for his followers? What could matter more for us?

God's truth has never lost its potency. The same truth that dwelled with Shadrach Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace, sustained the apostles throughout persecution in the earliest days of the church. The same truth that inspired Luther guides today's reforming disciples, too. The truth of Christ is clearly our lifeblood, so, let us echo Pilate's next question to Jesus: What *is* truth?

The truth Jesus proclaims is a world revealed as things *really* are, rather than the way we *pretend* they are. The truth is the Kingdom of God, the Reign of Christ. The truth is not a place, but a way of seeing all of creation through the lens of a *person*, who also happens to *be* God: Jesus, the Christ. OK, meaning what? To see creation like Jesus does means that the beatitudes are not nice ways of saying people are blessed, but statements of fact. It means commands to love one another are not suggestions for disciples, but a glimpse at what we are becoming – the identity we are invited to grab hold of and claim for ourselves. Jesus came to testify to the truth so that we would open our eyes and our hearts the same way he did, allowing ourselves to be made new, and forgiving one another where we fall short. Or, as Luther wrote, "We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it; the process is not yet finished."

In the past few weeks, I have seen this concept taking shape in many ways. Our Temple Talks were examples of growing toward what we are becoming – people shared beautiful reflections of their experiences, telling us how Grace's ministry impacted their lives. Several students affirmed the faith we share on Reformation Sunday, continuing the path of the truth Christ came to offer, and claiming their places among those who 'belong to the truth'. On All Saints, we remembered the witness of eight members who spent their lives listening for the voice of truth, and now hear nothing else - we who remain remember all Jesus did through *their* lives and invite the same truth to transform *us*, too.

In 2021, we identified growth as a theme for our goals, and we have grown. As we begin to look ahead, remember that growth is not something we leave behind in 2022. We seek to *connect*, that is, to grow *together*. And together, God will do even greater things, for we are together following the truth that makes all things possible. Luther's quote applies to us – individually and as a church family – and I look forward to the being the people we are becoming.

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Gregg

Pastor Rachel's Remarks:

For my November remarks, I want to share with you some beautiful moments I've been blessed to experience with our congregation in the last month or so. These are small glimpses into the way the Holy Spirit is working at Grace, which you might not have been able to see yourself, and I hope they'll bring you some joy and hope.

- Last Sunday was All Saints Day, and it was also a Young Youth meeting day. We always start our meetings the same, with highs, lows, and God moments. These are usually pretty simple topics. But this time, one of the children brought up death. And then another child shared their experience with death. And suddenly, we were in the middle of a holy conversation about Lazarus, and All Saints Day. We talked about how we will all be together with God one day, and how we celebrate those who have died, and how we can be sad and miss them, but also be glad that they are with God. Our youngest youths are paying attention when we talk about big things – and it's beautiful to see them hold onto their faith in Jesus when the big things seem scary.
- In our most recent ELCA Youth Gathering prep meeting, our topic was the boundless creation of God. We shared about our favorite animals, which included the cassowary (look this up, it's a terrifying bird!) and then read Psalm 104. This psalm includes the "Leviathan that you formed to sport in it." We laughed as we talked about other strange animals, sure that God was definitely just having fun when creating the cassowary and the platapus. We also marveled at the fact that gnats, and even smaller creatures, have whole, microscopic internal systems that we can't even fathom. We rejoiced in the stunning work of creation, and reflected that there is still so much of God's creation we don't know about yet.
- At our congregation picnic in October, there was joy in being together in a way that we haven't been able to in so long. Sharing a meal in open (perfectly temperatured) air was a gift from God, and it was palpable how meaningful this moment was for many of us. (Thank you, Parish Life!)
- On the Sunday we made our 2022 commitments, so many households offered their gifts to God. One member commented to me after worship, "That's the fastest I've ever seen our congregation come up to make their commitments." I was delighted to see some households send their children forward to make their household's commitment, teaching even at the youngest age that giving to God is an important part of who we are. I feel the Holy Spirit moving as we continue to make our commitments faithfully and intentionally.
- As our Confirmands gathered to review their work and rehearse their affirmation of Baptism, we talked about how they were feeling about making their affirmation. Several of them noted they were nervous, but not for the reason I would have guessed. They were not nervous about being in front of the congregation – they were nervous about taking on such important promises and maybe not being able to fulfill them. They were taking these promises so seriously (as we all should!) that they were concerned about making a promise they couldn't keep. We talked about how we will all certainly break these promises, but that in Christ, there is forgiveness and always another chance to work for God's kingdom in this world. And we remembered that the whole Church promises to help one another – these promises are individual and communal, and we are not on our own as we live in faith.

These are just a few holy moments from the last month. I'm certain that you've also experienced something holy this month – I encourage you to tell someone about it! When we share our experiences of God's wonderful work, we all grow in faith, hope, and joy.

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Rachel