

## ***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.

### ***Senior Pastor's Remarks:***

This coming Sunday we will hear a portion of Jesus' long farewell in the Gospel according to John ([John 15:1-8](#)). Essentially, this is the several-chapters-long way in which Jesus prepares to depart from the disciples, following his crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ascension. Though he knows he will be going, Jesus will not leave them without comfort or instruction. Rather, Jesus gives them a source of strength and life for the days and years ahead, telling them to **abide** in him. Abiding in Jesus will, he promises, produce much fruit.

That word – abide – is one John uses often. Translating the Greek word ( $\mu\acute{e}vw$ ) is tricky, because we may wonder what it means to abide. That word is not one we commonly use. There are other options for translating it, too. Elsewhere, the word is translated in these ways:

- remain
- stay
- continue
- endure
- wait
- reside

Jesus is clear in his teaching that the disciples are called to keep going in the mission once Jesus is no longer with them. But how do they *continue* while *remaining*? How do they *endure* in their journey while they *stay*? How do they abide?

This question extends beyond the study of Scripture; it is the basic question for disciples of every age. How do we approach faithful ministry, knowing that abiding in Jesus means devoting ourselves to both the old and the new, action and inaction, giving and receiving? I think the answer lies in that all-too-common Lutheran embrace of paradox, where opposite claims are simultaneously true, equally incomplete, unless taken together.

How can we abide in Christ in our time? Our mission statement may offer our answer to this question. We welcome all people; we grow together in faith; we join God's work in the world. Notice how our mission at Grace is multivalent. Notice how, in none of these claims, do we see the words, "some of us..." preceding what we do and who we are. No, we all do these things together. Moreover, these principles are interdependent.

Imagine trying to separate these at Grace. What would happen if we tried to ignore the first principle? What growth would not require the invitation for others to grow alongside us? How can we grow apart from other people? Growing – particularly growing in the faith *Jesus* gives us – is necessarily going to stir our hearts towards sharing our beloved community with others who are looking for precisely that kind of place and people.

The same problem emerges in joining what God is up to in the community around us. What kind of service to community would bear a *Christian* witness, unless it invited *all* to receive and *all* to give?

These three principles of Grace's ministry all work together, their combination holding space for an embrace of all things old and new, action and inaction, giving and receiving. In short, as we embrace this mission we have discerned together, we are going to experience what it means to abide in Jesus. The more we embrace this mission, the more fruit we will bear, and the more vital our common life will be.

Starting this Sunday, we will begin our worship services with the proclamation of our mission statement. I will invite everyone to join me in this ritual at the outset of worship, because it informs how we worship together. For that matter, this mission can be part of our practice for all the other activities at Grace, too. I hope and pray we will arrive at a shared commitment to the principles we have discerned together. I think that, in time, we will begin to see this as a way of abiding together as Grace, and therefore, abiding together in Christ.

Peace in Christ,  
Pr. Gregg

### **Pastor's Remarks:**

Every Tuesday, we send out our Grace E-news, with details about what's happening in the congregation and the community, and ways people can connect with ministry and mission. These are always worth the read! Occasionally, we send a "special e-news", a dedicated email about one topic that needs extra attention. Once in a while, these sadly announce a death, but usually, they are about something fun or exciting or new that's happening at or around Grace. I enjoy sending these kinds of special e-news emails, because it means good things are going on. This past month, we had enough special e-news emails planned that we've had to schedule them out over a number of weeks!

Several weeks ago, we were able to announce our 2024 Outreach Grant Partners! This year, we'll be working with Habitat for Humanity of York County, Children's Attention Home, and the Better Bound Book Store and Youth Development Corp. Hopefully you read more about each of those groups in our e-news – if not, click [HERE](#). One of our partnerships, Habitat, comes with a bittersweet connection; this was a passion of Earl Gatlin, and we will be participating in a special build in his memory. His commitment to the wellbeing of our community was enormous and extensive, and his work is an example for us all. In a small way, we'll get to follow his passion as we participate in this project. The other two of our partnerships are opportunities for Grace to explore a different area of need in our community than we've focused on recently: the needs of children. The Outreach Committee has already been impressed and inspired by the work of these two organizations, and we're looking forward to sharing them with you in the coming months. I hope everyone at Grace will take the opportunity to find a connection to one of our partners this year, whether for a day or for much longer.

Last week, we shared the special e-news for our Raffle in support of our youth going to the 2024 Youth Gathering. (See that e-news [HERE](#)). There are many fun, interesting, and useful items included in our Raffle, and already we've sold more than 450 tickets! What's really special about this to me, though, is how I see the gifts, talents, and generosity of our congregation on display in those items. We have several quilts to win – each of those is a gift of many hours of time and effort, talent sewn into works of art and comfort. There are baskets of handmade cards – cards that were lovingly created, piece by piece, with the hope that once they were sent, they'd bring light and love to their recipients. There are items of time and expertise to win – a photoshoot with Bob Goodbar, a consultation with Master Gardener Doris Lourigan, voice lessons with Craig Allen – gifts of knowledge and skill to be shared with those who could benefit from them. And there are a number of other items, chosen with intention, considering what interests there are in our congregation, and what might bring joy and delight, from grilling to art to moments of calm. Most importantly, all of these things have been donated generously in support of the faith of our Youth.

There are still 2 special e-news emails on the near horizon, and these are exciting as well! Soon, we'll have details about our upcoming Plant Sale, again to support our Youth trip. Member and Master Gardener Sabrina Blanks has been cultivating flowers and vegetable plants for months in anticipation of this sale. Through her dedicated work, we'll be able to enjoy beauty and bounty this summer, and as we enjoy these plants growing, we'll also know that we've taken part in the growth of our young people.

Finally, we'll have a Vacation Bible School special e-news going out, as registration opens for this week of summer fun and learning, which we'll be re-introducing after 4 years without. In this week, we'll join across generations to explore our connection with God and one another, teaching our youngest members that they are loved and there is a place for them here to learn and grow! There are many ways still to volunteer with this week, and that information will be in the e-news as well.

With each special e-news comes an opportunity for connection, and I give thanks that we have so many opportunities to share these days. I hope you'll make a point to read through all of our communications, to be able to take part in the ministry we share, and to add these connections to your prayers!

Peace in Christ,  
Pr. Rachel