

September Remarks from Our Pastors

From Pastor Gregg -

When we do not know what we are seeing, the resulting conclusions tend to be either confusion or error. Take, for example, the following passage from Psalm 19:

- ¹The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky proclaims its maker's handiwork.*
- ²One day tells its tale to another, and one night imparts knowledge to another.*
- ³Although they have no words or language, and their voices are not heard,*
- ⁴their sound has gone out into all lands, and their message to the ends of the world,
where God has pitched a tent for the sun.*
- ⁵It comes forth like a bridegroom out of his chamber; it rejoices like a champion to run its course.*
- ⁶It goes forth from the uttermost edge of the heavens and runs about to the end of it again;
nothing is hidden from its burning heat.*

What do you notice? The words are beautiful poetry, of course. They evoke a well-deserved respect for the Creator. For me though, the first thing I noticed was a point of scientific departure. The sun does not, for example, literally make its way across the sky from one day to the next. We are moving; the sun is stationary. Simple astronomy, right? Today, yes; but only since about 100 years *after* Luther. A new kind of reformer, Galileo Galilei also had a quarrel with the Church. He championed Copernicus' theory of heliocentrism. The Church could not, at that time, make space for this new understanding, in no small part because of Psalm 19. The Bible says the sun moves! God pitched a tent for it and everything!

Faced with a scientific question, the Church attempted to apply what it had (Scripture), while missing that Scripture was written for specific purposes and using specific tools. Galileo and Copernicus offered a new way of seeing the world and to engage this possibility, the Church brought only a literal, narrow understanding of its own beloved books. Clearly, Psalm 19 uses poetic language and similes to convey its message. For example, I do not know anyone who has personally observed a tent God pitched for the sun. Historical criticism (a way of studying the Bible) teaches us that, in all likelihood, Psalm 19 was written - at least in *part* - as a counterpoint to other ancient descriptions of how the sun emerges. The point being, that no other god had provided this life-giving, powerful force; no other god conceived the sun. Only the LORD was that great. If Psalm 19 speaks to astronomy, then, it is more of an invitation to wonder at the heavens - how God sets these awesome forces in motion. The Psalm is a starting point for our observation of the astonishing world around us, rather than a simple, easy answer to new questions.

I draw this distinction because I wonder whether, to the casual observer, our congregation's actions have been confusing lately. I wonder what the common passer-by notices about our activities. We are not all committed to staying in our homes, conducting worship, learning, fellowship, and business remotely. Yet we are not engaged in flagrant disregard for public safety either - we continue wearing masks, considering it our

responsibility as stewards of what God has made to push back against the pandemic, so that we are not easy vectors for the virus, and a breeding ground for new variants to emerge. We operate in the middle of the extremes, pushing boldly in two directions, fiercely committed to one another, and expressing our commitment through, at times, distance *from* one another.

Regardless of what *other* people might assume about our response, I have observed powerful commitment. I see commitment to Grace, and the Triune God encountered through this place, this people. Some join in worship in the Sanctuary every week - rain or shine - while others are just as faithful, even though they feel their call is to worship remotely. Today, thanks to the efforts of so many, we have two services each Sunday and both are live-streamed, so that everyone can continue to connect with that priceless teaching offered through the Word. All can see it for themselves. Commitment like that will be our witness. Our commitment to Christ and our commitment to one another will be our identity and our source of strength; it will cut through any confusion encountered along the way.

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Gregg

From Pastor Rachel -

This past Sunday, we had Young Youth & Youth kickoff, which was a blast. Our theme was Pool-Noodle-Oooza – every game was played with pool noodles! Noodle croquet, noodle javalin throw, noodle ring toss, and so on – 3 dozen noodles were required for this awesome afternoon. (As an aside, there's almost nothing as effective for starting a conversation with a stranger as holding 3 dozen pool noodles standing in line. Perhaps this should be explored for further evangelism opportunities...) We had a great time together, bonding over silly pool noodle use, establishing our faith-growing groups for the coming year. It was an excellent afternoon of community connection.

I'm seeing community building happening in a number of places in Grace right now. Sunday School groups are getting together (or continuing and growing); Parish Life events are happening (the ice cream social was a great success!); members are connecting outside of our walls by working together at HOPE; the choirs are back in full swing. This is exciting to me, because we are about to launch our fall stewardship drive and plans for 2022, where we'll be focusing on connections. I feel affirmation from the Spirit in our intentions for the coming year, because I see the Spirit already working with and through us towards the goals we haven't even officially announced yet!

And THIS year isn't done! We still have plenty of connections to be made in this last quarter of 2021. We've got some great opportunities to spend time in community happening right now with our final goal – Growing Across All Generations. We're getting set for projects, which as we saw with our 2020 goals, gives us the

chance to work with a variety of people in our congregation and find new connections. While we do the physical work of making our narthex, nursery, and youth room more accomodating to community building, we will be building community in real time. Again, I feel the Spirit moving as we finish out this year's goals in ways that move us right into the goals for next year. It is a Spirit-filled time!

I hope you'll find ways to be part of our projects this fall, and even moreso, I hope you'll find opportunities to connect with Grace and one another. It is a gift to be part of the Body of Christ and to be part of this community of faith!

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Rachel