

## Pastors' Remarks - August 2020

### From Pastor Gregg:

While much of what we do as a congregation is not unique, who we *are* is about as unique as it gets. God makes each one of us carefully, and has intentionally formed this community, this Grace Family, too. Our particularity is not lost on our Creator, who sees what we need and provides for us (we remember the feeding of the 5,000). This time in history is also somewhat unique - 'coronatide,' as some have called it - and though it has been difficult, this 'coronatide' has shown us once again how God has provided precisely what our congregation has needed.

First, let's take a look at worship. This is the center of our common call as Christians: praise of our Triune God. We have been disappointed not to gather together in the same physical space; however, we have been blessed by alternative ways of worshiping. We have worshiped well online, and our weekly services have improved with time. When preparing for a Sunday of vacation, Pr. Rachel and I sought to share several resources outside of our own productions. This not only afforded a blessed Sabbath for the production team, but also allowed all of us to explore the unique ways others are handling this need to worship online. Even within the six options we listed, there was great variety! Furthermore, we had the chance to see how other congregations are also providing worship that is uniquely suited to their needs and gifts. In this experience, we were able to see how God provides for *everyone*, which was inspiring.

In the last month, we also returned to Stage One in our *Granting Grace to One Another* plan. This pause for our in-person ministry afforded us the chance to produce a survey for the congregation, one that has given Council some insight as to how each household was making their decisions in this 'coronatide'. The responses included which factors were most impactful as we all look ahead and consider the risks associated with gathering together. Overwhelmingly, the responses reflected that most households are carefully considering the same information Council has been using, which was an encouraging validation of Council's discernment thus far. More importantly, though, the responses regarding worship in this time reinforced the idea that God has continued to provide spiritual nourishment for our Grace Family through this pandemic. The responses made clear that our congregation is capable of adapting in order to receive and share the Gospel in this unprecedented time.

Consider for a moment the length of this 'coronatide'. A week or two is one thing, but it has now been just over five months since the last time we worshiped together with song and sacrament. I could not have imagined that length of time before this pandemic. Of course, I have to acknowledge my privilege there - some of us have been kept away from the community for health concerns in the past (and for longer periods of time, in some cases). For me, though, this is entirely new. Considering the past five months, though, I do not only find disappointment; we have had the Word of God throughout. We have heard the Gospel proclaimed, and shared it in such a way that it has reached even more people than if we had been together physically.

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It is reminiscent of the Feeding of the 5,000, really. Looking at the past five months, we can focus on what we appeared to be lacking. Or, remembering that God always *provides* for us wherever God leads us, we can look back with humble gratitude at the manifold ways in which God has offered us spiritual nourishment each week. The Gospel of Jesus Christ has persisted in this time, as it has in all other trying times before this one. God continues to provide abundantly and uniquely for us.

It is right, I think, to lament the absence of community as we have known it. God made us for community. It is good to be hopeful and look forward to the day when we shall share in that community once again. But for today, in the meantime, let us not lose sight of the ways God continues to sustain this community with exactly what we need (and even enough to share).

### **From Pastor Rachel:**

Pr. Gregg and I took a much-needed time of vacation this month, for which I am grateful. I look forward to returning to fall ministry refreshed and recharged. We intend to use most of our remaining 2020 vacation time in the next 4 months, ensuring that we continue to take time to rest in the midst of what will almost certainly be a shifting landscape of ministry in pandemic.

During the rest of the month, I spent a lot of time considering what programming we might be able to plan for this fall. I met with the Youth & Family committee to review the spring and summer, to discuss what might work for fall, and to brainstorm creative solutions for social interaction within the restrictions to which we need to adhere. We are confident that we'll be able to do meaningful ministry, even though it might not look the way we would expect. The Learning committee will also be discussing plans in mid-August, based on conversations I've had with the chair, to continue forming faith in the fall.

I also began bringing our Hospitality Goals Team together. I connected with the chairs of Property, Beautification, and Parish Life to clarify several projects and to secure team members. I also invited members of the congregation to join us, putting a signup in the e-news. I'm hopeful that many people will want to take part in these exciting projects, so that we will have freshened spaces with more welcoming amenities once we are all back in the building. We'll begin more specific planning and working in the second half of August.

I am not sure exactly what the fall will bring, but I am sure that God will be with us as we work to share faith and love with each other. I am confident that Grace will continue to find ways forward through whatever we encounter.