

February 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:

This Scripture passage is not one we will hear in worship anytime soon, but it has been on my mind lately. Dwell in these words, which come from 1 John 3:

²Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.

I think this describes us pretty well at Grace. The core of who we are is unchanged. We are children of God, baptized in the waters of forgiveness and new life. Some of us have been engaged regularly of late, while others only tangentially, yet our participation does not change who we are at the core. Who we are is the adopted children of God. There's an encouraging reminder we always need: God chose us!

Being chosen, we are constantly becoming more than we could ever hope to be on our own. A process begins when the Holy Spirit enters our lives, one that carries us through a lifelong journey of growth. None of us knows enough about Scripture, worships enough, serves their neighbor enough, forgives or consoles enough (that includes the pastors, by the way). Still, we engage in these things, because they help us to know Jesus. Knowing Jesus, understanding his impact on our lives is perpetually rewarding and rather elusive at the same time. Fortunately, we have this encouraging reminder from John with this image: when he is revealed, we will be like him. Think of that! According to John, knowing Jesus and knowing ourselves are intertwined. The more we see his forgiveness, the more we can extend. When we get to know the limitless nature of his generosity, we discover our own capacity to give of ourselves. As we begin to look towards Lent, keep that concept in mind.

This year we continue our larger themes of connecting and renewing our membership during the Lenten journey. The central focus for us this Lent is: Who are we *now*? That is to say, we have all been changed by the past two years of living through a pandemic. We have all experienced great struggle and loss. How have these difficult things left their mark on us? How has it changed the people we are becoming? Most importantly, how is God active in those losses, working the holy task of redemption?

In the coming weeks, we are going to have conversation around tables on Wednesday evenings, prompted by questions regarding the ways God calls us to be the Lutheran church, together, for the sake of the world. What does that look like as we move into the future? These questions and conversations will not be academic - they will be personal. We will be inviting the personal experiences of the people sitting around these tables because our personal stories matter. Returning to the Scripture, when we see Jesus rightly, we see that we are like him. Our stories and his are not separate, and that is good, because Jesus takes on our stories and redeems them. We usually spend Lent focused on how Jesus takes on *death* to transform it, and we will certainly not sidestep the limitless power of the resurrection to defeat death this year. Still, this year seems like a particularly timely opportunity to consider the ways life as we have experienced it lately, is not the limits to the richness God intends.

So, in the several weeks that are to come, bring your whole self on this journey with us. Bring your disappointments, your laments, your hopes and curiosity, too. Bring it all with you to Lent, and through that Lenten journey, experience how Jesus transforms it all, redeems it all, and makes you more like him.

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Gregg

Pastor Rachel's Remarks:

This month, a lot happened surrounding our children, youth, and young adults. Most of it has been great! One part has been pretty disappointing.

I'll start with the disappointment: the ELCA Youth Gathering for 2022 has been cancelled. This Gathering was originally postponed from 2021, due to COVID. Unfortunately, it became clear that the ELCA would not be able to host the kind of event intended in the current circumstances. We are grateful to the leaders who did the difficult discerning work and for their faithful decision, in spite of the disappointment they knew would come. This means that our three youth – Lou, Mary, and Cameron – who have already been preparing for 6 months for this trip, along with the pastors and Lori Brown, will not be going on this anticipated trip. We share their disappointment. *But we are not done yet!* Our group has decided we will do something else together, likely the week of the Gathering, that will form our faith. We don't yet know what that will be. Many ELCA organizations are working on creating options for the thousands of youth impacted by this decision, and one of those may be right for us. We may create our own experience. When we know what our next step is, we will be sharing that with you, Grace, because we know you will want to support these youth however you can!

Speaking of the support you give to our youth – the Youth Room update is finally finished, thanks to your gifts of money, time, and effort. Our Young Youth & Youth had their first meetings in their 'new' space at the beginning of February, and they were so excited to be in the place that is clearly intentionally designed for them and by them. (If you haven't been down yet, you are invited to go see it! We'll be sharing photos in the e-news soon, as well). We all know that having a place made intentionally for you is one of the most welcoming things – this space tells our children and youth that they matter to us, that we want them here, and that their formation is vital.

This formation focus continues on in another wing of our building; those many Sunday School classrooms that we painted and updated are filling up! In January, we brought back in-person Sunday School for our children. It has been wonderful to hear them in that hallway, talking about Jesus and sharing time together. We give thanks for the adults who are supporting them in this formation! And we are glad that our adult classes continue strong. Additionally, we'll be adding another adult option in March – keep an eye on the e-news for that information!

We are also working on connecting with a group we have named "GYM ALUM" – these are Grace young adults who are 4 or less years out of high school. This is a time of life with a lot of transition, when young people are often living away from home for the first time, and the Youth & Family committee is exploring ways to support these young adults and share God's love with them. We've started with a coffee meetup and valentines, and we'll see where else God leads us.

Finally, I had the great opportunity to spend 4 days in Minneapolis this past weekend at the ELCA Youth Ministry Network Extravaganza. My focus at this conference was Revitalizing Children's Ministry. I learned some incredibly helpful things about formation and a number of new resources to support our Children's Ministry. And, it turns out, many of the things that bolster Children's Ministry are also helpful in Youth, Young Adult, and Adult Ministry, so I look forward to sharing and incorporating what I learned to benefit all of our formation ministries here at Grace, as we all learn and grow in faith together.

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Rachel