

## *From Pastor Gregg*

To prepare effectively for a journey, we first need some information: Who is coming with us? How long will we be gone? What circumstances do we expect to face? - things like that. The past month of pastoral ministry has been marked by preparation. Preparing in an uncertain time is tricky and time consuming, too. What will worship look like in a month? That depends. What sort of fellowship will we share? Again, that depends. Preparing for most of what we do is a series of hypotheticals. Questions like When and How have been daily realities for all of us for more than a year now, and they have not come with easy answers. Each day we have been reminded how much we rely on God's abundant grace.

*[the LORD] said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" [Ezekiel] answered, "O LORD God, you know." Ezekiel 37:3*

The scene from Ezekiel will be heard in its entirety on Pentecost, but for now, I just want us to consider this brief exchange. God asks the prophet whether a valley of dry bones can live. Ezekiel could answer with the wisdom of the world, that of course bones will not be repurposed. Or he could instead assume that God would certainly step-in and do something miraculous, casting aside all he knew about the tendency of bones to remain...well, bones. Choosing neither, he just replies with an obvious statement: God knows. (And also: Ezekiel does not.) Next, God will command Ezekiel to take a step in faith, sharing a vision for God's people, but before Ezekiel *does* anything after this encounter, we see here that he begins from a place of some humility. He is patient. He is trusting.

The past month of planning has included many conversations with staff, committees, volunteers, and others, regarding *how* and *when* we are to make our way back to the kind of in-person ministry we all long to share once again. Often we have asked questions wondering, *What* will it look like? What are we expecting to find? These conversations have been informed by feedback in the recent congregation survey, too, so when it comes to perspectives and preferences, our cup truly runs over. Fortunately, much of information is pointing in a similar direction: most of us are ready to make some deliberate steps forward, ease restrictions, and start the journey to a new normal. The science is finally starting to show more than just dry old bones on the horizon and we are beginning to glimpse a little life.

So as we make our way - *before* we take another step forward - let us commit to measuring *our* approach against the model set by Ezekiel. Are we stepping forward in humility? Patience? Trust? These are the building blocks of healthy community together and without them, our footing will be precarious at best.

We will need humility for the coming days. We are learning more every day but the age-old wisdom still applies to the science of our time: learning more only shows us how much we still do not know. Patience will be necessary, too. As was outlined many months ago, the response of our congregation will be too fast for some and too slow for others. We need to have patience with one another because there are factors - grief and loss, chief among them - that make it next to impossible to see beyond our own perspectives. So, while we sometimes shake our heads at those who 'just don't get it', we will need to trust that God will make things right on this path we are preparing to travel. It will take time, but God has a way of making even the most disrupted, undesirable circumstances work together somehow for the good. God can breathe new life into a whole valley of dry bones and God will breathe new life into the ministry we share.

Hang in there, Grace Family. We are about to take some new steps together.

Peace in Christ,  
Pr. Gregg

## *From Pastor Rachel*

In worship during the pandemic, we have observed the offering a little differently. Rather than passing the offering plate, we have taken this moment in the service to give thanks for the gifts God gives us and the chance to give them back to God, and to say thank you to everyone who is supporting Grace's mission and God's work. I have been glad for the chance to say thank you each week, because the generosity of Grace's people is truly extraordinary, and it's important that we recognize this strong support and dedication. I've also loved being able to share quick stories and updates about how these gifts have been making a difference in the congregation, community, and world.

This past month, I've seen even more than usual how our congregation's generosity is making a difference, and I want to be sure you know about it, too. Support from 2020 is still making an impact, and generosity in 2021 is allowing us to move forward on exciting new goals and projects.

We are nearly done with our Hospitality projects from 2020. This weekend we are resetting all the classrooms that have been refreshed, which will be welcoming and waiting for our members to return. Our Conference room is getting final touches, as is the men's study/AA room. I can't wait to show you all the final reveal, which is the result of months of volunteer hours and dedication, in addition to faithful funding.

Our 2020 surplus was outstanding, as we know. And with such a significant surplus entrusted to the church, the Council has been deliberate in making choices about how to distribute the charitable and facilities funds. This month, I had the blessing of joining two Grace members in delivering surplus grant checks to Life House Women's Shelter and Bethel Men's Shelter. In those deliveries, I was able to meet the women running these ministries and hear about how much of a difference their ministries are making in our community. In these moments of handing over grants, I was so proud of Grace for our generosity and care for our neighbors needing housing. I've shared more about how this money made an impact in the e-news, and I hope you've seen those stories (go back and look if not!). The check for Safe Passages was also delivered, and I'll be sharing that story next week.

The surplus also continues to enable us to improve our internal hospitality, which is especially wonderful as we look forward to the nearing day when we can welcome people back more fully into the church building. Last week, we had the sound panel fabric replaced in the Fellowship Hall, and the visual difference is delightful. It is crisp and clean and inviting, and with the improved bulletin-board core backing, the fabric will hold up longer this time around as we share pictures and information in the place where we gather. This project would likely not have been possible this year if not for the significant generosity in 2020.

And our congregation's generosity has not stopped, nor has our work. Already this year, we've been able to give \$20,000 in Partnership grants, and the Outreach committee is hard at work organizing opportunities for us to connect our time and talents with these partners. Our Young Youth & Youth have continued to meet, including doing several service projects. Our Endowment Committee is looking towards Grace's future and discussing how to empower ministry for decades to come. Place of Grace is exploring how else to use our property asset to support valuable ministries in our community. WELCM is discerning a new direction and can do so because of Grace's support, seen in meals and cards and conversations. Our worship services continue to evolve, with ongoing participation in so many ways. And we have so much more going on and more to do! Our 2021 goals are really getting rolling, and our congregation's ongoing support – YOUR SUPPORT! – in time, talent, and treasure will allow us to keep doing what we've heard God calling us to do this year!

So, once again, thank you for your continued generosity – each gift truly matters and makes a difference! Thank you for using God's gifts for God's work in the world! Thank you for being part of this congregation and the mission we share.

Peace in Christ – Pr. Rachel