September 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:

See the words of the anthem we sang last Sunday:

> *Behold! Behold! I will do a new thing!*
> *Everything old has passed away. See, everything has become new.*
> *I will make a way in the wilderness. I will make rivers in the desert.*
> *See, everything old has passed away. Everything has become new.*
> *Do not remember the former things or consider the ways of old.*
> *Everything old has passed away. See, everything has become new.*
> *I will make a way in the wilderness. I will make rivers in the desert.*
> *The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and ostriches,*
> *for I give water in the wilderness; the desert shall be a pool.*
> *See, everything old has passed away.*
> *I will make a way in the wilderness. I will make rivers in the desert.*
> *Everything old has passed away!*
> *I will make a way!*

These words should sound familiar. They are borrowed from Isaiah 43:19-20 and 2 Corinthians 5:17. The music was the original part of this work, arranged by Tom Trenney. While I have appreciated many of the selections performed by our Parish Choir, this anthem may have been the most meaningful I have been privileged to sing.

Learning this piece was difficult. The rhythms were staggered and syncopated. Sometimes the voice parts were singing the same words, though a couple of beats apart from one another. Other times, each voice part would be singing the same words, but with neighboring notes, tightly clustered together. In those sections, our being 'together' included the uncomfortable feeling of difference in tight proximity. The piece continues and this difficulty smooths out, with dissonance giving way to complementary cascading sounds. It is as though the words – spoken by God – are being made manifest in their singing, their proclaiming. God is indeed making a way, first for the singers - something that, in our first rehearsal of the piece, seemed every bit as unlikely as rivers forming in the desert. This piece was a powerful reminder that God *does* perform the unexpected, seemingly impossible thing when necessary, and everyone – from jackals to ostriches to the children of God – stands back in awe of what God can do.

This month we get to hear about the stewardship goals for the coming year. Each goal is familiar, since we are continuing our commitment to the strategic plan. We have already made great progress towards each initiative, and in the second year, we are renewing our purpose, so we do not lose momentum. In any three-year period, that second year is the risky part. The second year is when progress can stall. The finish line can seem too distant for any excitement we might otherwise have about fulfilling our plans. To fortify ourselves for the journey, this year we have powerful stories of how the mission we share at Grace is already accomplishing what we are called to do. These stories are the way we proclaim that the promises of God extend to <u>us</u>, the way we remind one another that God makes a way for <u>us</u>. In their sharing, these stories are like signs of water in the desert. These stories echo a promise that is already in our bones, and when we hear them, we remember that eternal truth that God <u>will</u> make a way for us.

When you encounter these powerful and reassuring stories this month, I invite you to give thanks to God for the way Grace is working in the lives of the people involved. Then, consider how God has made a way for you, too. Perhaps you received what you needed at a difficult time. Maybe you found provision in the community of Grace. Or, maybe the path stretching out before you appears daunting right now; we all have our moments when we wonder whether God is going to show up and make a way for us one more time.

When Paul wrote 'everything old has passed away', he was referring to the way we understand creation itself. He was arguing that, in Christ, the world was being renewed, which included the way we understand reality. Everything is being made new in Jesus. Hear this in the stories of our members, remember how it has happened for you, and trust that the next new experience of God's abiding provision is already on the way. God <u>will</u> make a way for each of us.

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Gregg

Pastor's Remarks:

This month includes our Fall Stewardship Drive, Renewing Our Purpose. While we anticipate a stewardship drive every fall, with some of the same basic components, this year is a little different. This year, because we are in the midst of our 3-year Strategic Plan, we are not introducing new goals. We are continuing with the 3 Strategic Initiatives that we discerned for our Strategic Plan, and that we have been working on steadily this year.

These initiatives are important! And still, it can be a challenge to stay energized about the same things for 3 years. That's why our theme in 2025 is Renewing Our Purpose. We are recommitting to this work for the coming year because we are confident that God is calling us to do this work; it is our purpose in this time and place. We will be Growing Volunteers and Leaders, Increasing Congregational Connections, and Serving Campus and Community, in continued ways and new ways.

The best part of this fall drive, for me, has been the stories! Our bulletin inserts and first letter have featured stories from Grace members who have been part of our initiatives. They've each shared how they've taken part in the work we're doing together, and how their participation has impacted their lives and encouraged their faith. One thing I've enjoyed about each of these stories is seeing how the gifts shared in each situation have rippled out to touch so many people. From Family Promise to VBS to Home Communion to Outreach Partners, each story comes from one person, but the impact spreads across dozens of people. I've also been so moved by the Temple Talks, where Grace members have boldly shared their generosity stories. We've heard how time and experience shape our understanding of generosity, how participating in the life of the church can change our outlook on giving, and how investing in the church financially as well as with time an effort makes a difference for the work we do here. I'm grateful to everyone who has shared their stories, and I'm hopeful that we can keep sharing stories in the months to come.

I'm sure that you have your own story of how being part of the mission we share here has impacted your life. I'd love to hear it, if you'd like to share. There is good work happening right now, work that will move us into the new year and the renewal of our purpose, and we share good news when we share those stories.

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Rachel