

November 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:

The pace of fall accelerates more often than I would prefer. It seems every year this season is slow to arrive, and all too quickly gives way to winter. I wish we could slow things down, dwelling in the leaves, the cooler temperatures, and a time when the Packers had any hope for making the playoffs. No such luck. Still, a bit of this season remains, including an important time of gathering what will be needed for the next new things God will be doing. We are gathering people, plans, and prospects for the future.

We continue to gather people in this season, and it has been encouraging to see more faces attending worship and fellowship events recently. The Children's Choir has been bringing more of the younger folks, which reminds all of us how important it is to be in worship with as many generations as possible. On the other end of the age spectrum, I thoroughly enjoyed a Seniors@Grace event which highlighted some of the best that German cuisine has to offer – it was the perfect complement to this season. Several of us also got to spend part of an afternoon together out at the lake for the Church Picnic, which we shared on what seemed like the 'perfect' fall day. The gathering for Reformation Sunday was a treat, as our worship was bolstered by five brass players from Winthrop, plus we celebrated the Fall Festival that afternoon (even in the drizzly rain). These kinds of gatherings continue throughout the remainder of this year, and I look forward to the way we can continue to connect with one another, bringing more people together with Grace events as the catalyst.

We are also gathering plans for another year of ministry together. Grace's Council has listened deeply and intentionally to the opportunities that generate the most passion for our members. Accordingly, we have outlined goals for the coming year which will put that passion to work. We believe we have a strong overall plan for the coming year, celebrating the past and working toward a stronger future for Grace. By the end of 2023 we will have a stronger sense of pride in whom we've been, and a better grasp of the people we are becoming for the sake of the Gospel.

Looking ahead more generally, our prospects for an even fuller year of ministry are strong. Our membership grows this month, as we welcome several new siblings to the Grace Family, each of whom brings something special to make us even stronger as a congregation. We have a couple of Baptisms on the horizon, which reminds us that we are still called to help nurture the youngest among us in the faith. Baptism is also our opportunity to reaffirm for ourselves the fundamental components of the faith we share. Yes, we promise to help the newly baptized to grow, and we also commit to the same growth ourselves. We have had a remarkably strong pledge drive this fall, which gives additional confidence to the belief that God will provide for us next year. This support provides a little extra assurance that God does not call us to a task without equipping us with what we need to accomplish it. Moreover, with each passing month, we get to celebrate that we do not need to make any more mortgage payments!

These are only some of the good signs I have been noticing in this season, which are every bit as striking as the fall colors all around us. I hope you've been noticing them, too, and I encourage you to dwell in these blessings, mindful of the many ways in which the Spirit is moving here at Grace. Share this good news with others, too, so that we are a people fully aware of the ways we are blessed, and eager to invite others to come and see it for themselves.

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Gregg

Pastor's Remarks:

“What does devoted mean?” This question came in the middle of Children’s Word Time last week, as we read a pop-up book about the Reformation. We use ‘stop-sign reading’ in CWT (and in Young Youth) where the kids can put up their hands like a stop sign when they hear a word they don’t know, so the reader knows to stop and explain. Turns out, there are a lot of words in Scripture and in church in general that we don’t use every day! In this particular instance, I began to explain, and then stopped, stumped. The other adult and I looked at each other, both trying to figure out how to explain ‘devoted.’ We both knew what it was, but it took a minute to find the words to explain it to the kids.

This happens over and over in CWT, in Young Youth, and in general conversation with our kids. They are learning new words, new ideas, new parts of the world, and they are willing to ask for answers when they don’t know. Sometimes their questions are easy to answer, like when was Jesus born – we remind them about Christmas, when we celebrate Jesus’ birthday. Some are much harder, like “How can Jesus be God and a person?” Each one is an opportunity to help them grow further into their faith!

I love these questions, for many reasons. For one, they’re often delightful! Kids see things in ways we’ve forgotten, and it’s a fun surprise to be invited back into a childlike wonder. Their questions remind me that we have a lot of ‘insider language’ in the church, and it’s important that we not leave people ‘outside’. It’s also an exercise for me, finding out where my knowledge is limited only for me. I know inherently what ‘devoted’ means, but if I can’t share that with others, I can’t welcome them into deeper understanding. And my knowledge is not supposed to be just for me; we are a community, and community works to lift everyone up and help everyone grow!

Most importantly, these questions from our children are reminders that *it’s ok to have questions*. It’s GOOD to have questions, in fact, because it means we realize we don’t have all the answers. It means we’re willing to admit we don’t know something. Adults are not always good at this. The world suggests that we are somehow ‘less than’ if we don’t have all the answers, and we don’t want to be less than, so we keep quiet. But the truth is, no one has ALL the answers, except God of course. What we *do* have is the continual opportunity to learn and grow, in faith and in life, if we take the chance to ask.

I wonder what questions you might have, about faith, Scripture, our life as the church, or anything else. I invite you to recognize your questions, to ask them, and to discern in community what the answers may be. When it comes to faith, sometimes the answers aren’t clear. We have holy mysteries that elude perfect explanation; but in dwelling in the mysteries, we can get closer to God. If you have questions, I’d love to explore them with you! I might not have the answer, but we can learn together.

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Rachel