

Pastors' Remarks from their Council reports for May 13, 2020 – June 9, 2020

Pastor Gregg's Remarks:

[This week's Gospel lesson](#) includes the following:

"When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.'"

Jesus proclaims important things, and then follows that with important action. He proclaims that the harvest is plentiful (good news), and also that the laborers are few (not-so-good news). He is describing God's abundance, the riches of God's Kingdom, available in great supply, as well as the lack of willing hands to make good use of that abundance. Then, having described the situation, he sends his disciples out, with the simple instruction that they are to share the good news with God's people. Having assessed that the laborers are few, he expects his disciples to *be* laborers, going out to find *more* laborers, and by the end of the passage, he will have prepared them for successes and setbacks alike.

I am struck by the parallels of this present time. Even in a time of pandemic and economic difficulty, God's abundance abides. We have not been able to gather physically, but the limitations of this time have opened the way for us to conduct ministry in an entirely new way. While technology has its limitations, its capacity to extend our reach has been awe-inspiring to see. We have had new participation in worship leadership, fellowship, faith formation, Youth activity, and creative expressions of faith. All of us miss the communal gathering of our congregation - to say nothing of our longing for the sacraments themselves - yet the ways we have pulled together in this time have inspired so much that we might not have otherwise experienced. Truly, God's abundance is on display every week! The harvest really is plentiful!

I think we can also acknowledge that such an abundance matters little if we are not willing to labor. Who among us has not had to adapt, adjust, accommodate the demands of this particular harvest? Whether it was downloading and learning a new software program, or making extra efforts in calling our sisters and brothers, we have all had to *work* for this harvest. And given the particular challenges due to all this physical distancing - the sense that just about everything feels more difficult these days - it is especially tempting to gravitate away from the work of the harvest. It would be easier to wait for another.

And then there was George Floyd. Video of this man's callous execution has been available for all who are willing to see - almost nine minutes of the most repugnant sin imaginable, carried out in full view of other officers. And now, in case you have not yet posed the question to yourself, allow me: So, what?

This pandemic has shed new light on many things, some good, some bad, and others deplorable. We have seen glimpses of the abundance of God's harvest. We have seen the deeply embedded pestilence of racism. We have seen these things before our eyes in our time and we need to ask

ourselves, So, what? What about it? What are we going to *do* with this information? We have heard Jesus inviting disciples (us) into the abundance of God's Kingdom, and we have to look deep within ourselves to determine what we will do in response. We have seen injustice in clear, sobering brutality and we have to ask ourselves whether or not we actually possess commitment to the promises we make in our Baptisms, our Confirmations, and even the weekly profession of faith through the Creeds. We believe...So, what?

When I ask myself these questions, and do so in light of the Gospel text, I am convicted that I have not always been a laborer. Too often I have commented on the crop, supposing this or that which might have affected it. Yet, regardless of the past, even the *time* of the harvest is abundant - there is *still* day left; I *still* have an opportunity before me to take part in what God is doing. So, with opened eyes and a renewed sense of purpose, I am heading out to work, differently than before - I hope you'll join me. Kingdom work is not promised to be easy, but it *is* good. And I believe God continues to provide.

Peace in Christ, Pr. Gregg

Pastor Rachel's Remarks:

This month, Council and the Health & Wellness Committee moved to weekly check-in meetings in order to more closely monitor the COVID-19 situation in our area and discuss what is best for Grace in terms of in-person activities. These extra meetings speak to the dedication of our Council and Health and Wellness Committee to the mission of Grace and the wellbeing of its members. I am grateful for the committed leadership at Grace, as these decisions are not easy and involve a lot of time and consideration.

I have continued to enjoy the opportunity to join in conversation with members during our Facebook Live Coffee Hour each Sunday. We discuss a variety of topics, from deep theological quandaries and worship experiences to our breakfast and tv preferences. I feel that I've gotten to know a number of people better through this fellowship time (and hopefully they've gotten to know their pastors better, too), which is a real gift in a time when we may be feeling somewhat disconnected because of the physical distance between us.

It's difficult to 'look ahead' and make plans right now, as so much is unknown. I am doing most of my program planning week to week and adapting as we go. However, I *am* looking ahead to the ways that Stewardship for All Seasons is going to help us grow this year, and I am more excited than ever. There is an extra layer of leadership training and growth involved in SAS (and in the book 'Abundance' which the Stewardship Committee and Council are reading) which I did not realize was included (this is a newer component, I believe). I am confident that this extra focus on leadership is the Holy Spirit moving in our midst. We had planned for 2020 to be a year of leadership growth, and the pandemic has complicated those plans; now, new opportunities are appearing before us and keeping us moving forward. This is just one sign of many of God being with us, even in chaotic times.

Peace in Christ, Pr. Rachel