

From Pastor Gregg

By now you are all probably familiar with our plans to observe the season of Lent (and, if not, [click here](#)). This year's theme for the season borrows language we hear just before celebrating Communion, words reminding us that it is indeed right, our duty and our joy that we should *at all times and in all places* offer thanks and praise to God through Jesus Christ. While those words are always true, I think they ring just a bit more accurate in these days. We are not gathered in one place for worship, but we are instead able to worship together in many places, and for that matter, at many times. We are not in the same classroom, yet more people are able to engage with Scripture from a variety of locations, talking with their pastors and one another about what they have heard and experienced.

Of course, these things have been true for many months now. One might be prone to wonder, then, if Lent is just more of the same. In a way, yes; we are continuing to offer these things through this season. Our Sunday morning worship is going to be the same as we have come to know it since October (with the exception of a few select weeks since), affording the opportunities to share in Word and Sacrament. We will still offer a coffee hour. We will still offer Communion visits, pastoral care, Bible studies, and so on. But even though these things continue, we are also about to *add* to what we will do together.

Lent will be different this year because our worship opportunities will also include a new (to our congregation) worship service of evening prayer. This evening prayer service called *Compline* is a blend of ancient prayers, Scripture, and song, but also includes newer hymns of praise. We will hear from a variety of voices in the music of *Compline*, yet the point of its structure is to give a predictable rhythm to the end of the day. We hope that, by providing worship booklets that include several more hymns than we will sing in any one service, we will be providing the opportunity for folks to use this evening prayer service as many times as they wish throughout these weeks. We will produce a new video each Wednesday, but the benefits of access at all times and in all places is that each of us can add a new way of worshiping in our lives each day, if desired. So the good news is that, though we may have lost some worship opportunities temporarily this Lent, *Compline* represents a significant gain.

Lent also allows us to connect over meals. This is something I have always loved about this season. While we cannot gather around tables in the Fellowship Hall this year, we still have the chance to gather around many *kitchen* tables - dining digitally, if you like. Building on the warm reception of the Virtual Coffee Hour events held each week, our midweek 'Supper & Spirit' events will be chances to see how each Sunday's Scripture has impacted the first half of our weeks, and to prepare for the coming Sunday's text. Too often we reserve one day per week as our time for engaging with the Bible and the proclamation of the Gospel. This year, we can be intentional about seeing these things in our daily work and interactions, and then bring those experiences to the table(s) on Wednesday evenings. Plus, our spirits will be fed by these conversations, as we explore new ways of practicing our individual spirituality each week. *NOTE: In hopes of involving even more people in these live conversations, we are moving to Grace's YouTube page for these events, so don't forget to [join us there](#)!*

In a season of following Christ to the cross, it is common to think of things we might try to 'do without' until Easter. While these mild sacrifices *can* be helpful, I think we have all sacrificed a great deal in the past year, and this year's Lent will be better observed with an eye towards the ways God continues to surprise us, providing for us, loving us, without exception. Jesus was able to survive forty days in the wilderness on his own, but we would do well to remember that we only need *one person* to be Jesus. We are not Jesus, and we are *not* on our own - not if we are willing to reach out to one another this year. So in this season of Lent, let us continue to trust in the mercy of Christ, and be intentional about connecting with him and one another *at all time and in all places*.

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Gregg

From Pastor Rachel

Our kids are stressed out. You've probably noticed it if you have kids or grandkids or know a kid (or have been a kid). Things are stressful for all of us, but kids have very little control over their own lives, and *especially* during a pandemic, that can cause lots of stress. They can't make a lot of choices. They're missing out on a lot of connections. And there's not a lot they can do about it.

So, in the first Young Youth and GYM meetings of February, we spent the afternoon talking about self-care, and how loving and caring for ourselves is part of being a faithful follower of God. We took a look at Matthew 22, and noticed that in addition to the importance of loving God and loving neighbor, Jesus said we need to love our neighbor AS OURSELVES. Loving ourselves is vitally important if we want to care for others.

This is true for our kids, and it's true for us. We need to be loving ourselves. We need to be caring for ourselves. We need to remember that self-care is not selfish, or wasteful, or self-indulgent. When we care for ourselves, we are caring for a beautiful part of God's creation – and empowering ourselves to care for the rest of creation, too.

One part of self-care that we learned is the importance of connecting with God – of caring for our spirit. We talked about taking time to pray, time to rest, time to be with God in quiet moments. We often learn how to do these things IN church, but sometimes it's hard to take those practices home and do them there. This is one of the reasons I'm so excited about our Lenten Wednesdays coming up. Each week, we're going to learn a new spiritual practice (a way to pray and connect with God). And we'll be learning them *at home* – the place where we will do them most often. We're incorporating tactile practices, practices that engage the senses, practices that invite you to connect your body and your spirit, practices that can be done for 5 minutes or 50 minutes. While each practice might not work for every person, we are hopeful that at least one will resonate, and that this can become part of our self-care of spirit.

I'm hopeful that these practices will help us love ourselves, as well as God and neighbor, better. I'm hopeful that in these practices, we'll be uplifted and connected with Christ in new ways. I'm hopeful that you'll all join us for these spirit-caring opportunities and find yourselves renewed.

Peace in Christ
Pr. Rachel