

July Remarks from Our Pastors

From Pastor Gregg -

"If we only listened with the same passion that we feel about being heard."

- Harriet Lerner, Ph.D.

"O Divine master, grant that I may...not so much seek to be understood as to understand."

- Francis of Assisi, saint

The witness of one of the leading voices in clinical psychology and the prayer of St. Francis pair nicely together. Lerner's point helps us avoid miscommunication - imagine how much better we would understand one another if we were as passionate about hearing as we were about speaking! St. Francis even subordinates his part in conversation, trusting that he will gain more from understanding others.

In the last three weeks, I have heard more stories than what is typical. I have spent more time with people in hospitals, homes, and care facilities. More time hearing about the past, and hoping for the future. The pandemic threatened our lives, a threat which has produced fear, and that fear has had the effect of a loud white noise - we have found it more difficult to hear one another above the noise of this fear. But as conditions improve, I have been able to spend more time with people in-person. With every interaction, it is as though the white noise of fear is diminishing. Engaged in conversations with members of Grace, I have been blessed and renewed by the ways people are every bit as willing as before to share their lives with me. In fact, many have been *more* open than before the pandemic. Perhaps this whole ordeal has revealed the fragility of our lives in a way that makes us better prepared to make the most of our time.

In [the Gospel text for this coming Sunday](#), Jesus is doing precisely that with the disciples: making the most of his time. He knows that his earthly ministry is not going to be a long one (in fact, throughout Mark's story, Jesus is constantly trying to extend this time, telling people to keep their miracles quiet for the time being). Still, he makes the time for an attempt at Sabbath with his disciples. He knows they need a break - time for spiritual renewal and fellowship - values which were important then, as they are today. Yet in our story, we read how even amid their intentional rest, the compassion Jesus has for other people is the final word. He teaches. He heals. He loves. But the only reason the people experience this grace is because Jesus is constantly listening. Wisdom accompanies his compassion, if we are paying attention.

Like Jesus, last Sunday we had the ability to listen. We had worship, of course, and some fellowship afterwards, too. We could have left it at that. Instead, several of us took the time to walk next door, to a building where the needs of our neighbors are being met. And there, we listened. We heard how people are being fed, yes, and we also heard how ordinary people are coming together to do the feeding. We heard how assistance is going out to those most in need, and we also heard how the giving of those with plenty makes it happen. In short, we heard God's abundance, saw it with our eyes, and perhaps even caught a glimpse of future opportunities for us all. It all begins with the listening.

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In the coming weeks, I hope we can adjust our focus ever so slightly, doubling our efforts to listen to one another. We enjoy wonderful worship here together, and new fellowship opportunities are on the horizon for us, too. Yet these things alone do not build community unless the people who are engaged in them are committed to hearing one another. Intentionality is required to absorb all the joys, sorrows, concerns, fears, hopes, and dreams that each person has. This listening is a crucial component to discernment, and we cannot hope to follow Christ faithfully without it, let alone build a stronger community in his name.

So, this month, I have a challenge for you: listen to one 'new' voice. Really try to hear somebody's story. You may be surprised at how much more we can hear when we are really, genuinely listening.

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Gregg

From Pastor Rachel -

This month was our 3-month mark in our Outreach Partnerships, which meant we got to check in and see how things are going so far. Our liaisons each submitted a report which was shared in the e-news (go back and read if you missed them!). These reports included updates on how helpful these organizations are in the community, and affirmed that our partnerships do matter for our neighbors. Outreach is planning for more interaction with our partners in the coming months, and I'm looking forward to seeing how these unfold.

Of course, we just had our first big interaction with our closest partner, HOPE of Rock Hill. On July 11, HOPE hosted an open house for our congregation, to tour the facility and hear about the needs being met in our community. Many members went over for the tour – more than 40, I believe. HOPE's director, Gordon Bell, shared that he was 'blown away' by our turnout. And not only did our members take the tour, many of you signed up to help! The volunteer coordinator was excited about new volunteers, and shared that she's had excellent interactions with our members who have already been volunteering.

Personally, I get to see the work HOPE is doing on weekday mornings when I come into work. The parking lot is nearly always full, and the food comes rolling down the ramp steadily. Just this morning, I saw volunteers constructing an improved ramp system, to make loading food more efficient. It is clear that the need for food in our community is significant, and I feel blessed that we have this opportunity to join HOPE in making a difference.

If you didn't get the chance to visit HOPE, they would love to have you over – just give them a call! And keep an eye out for upcoming information about events with our other two partners, who are doing equally valuable work in our community, and who might be just the organization you've been waiting to help.

I am deeply grateful to be part of a congregation and church community that is dedicated to seeing the needs of those around us and working to care for them. Thank you all for your commitment to loving our neighbors and being Christ in the world!

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Rachel