

## **From the Pastor**

One of the joys of serving God in pastoral ministry involves the privilege of being with people through the seasons of life: from births and adoptions to death and funerals, from new love discovered and relationships ending and all the steps in between. There are the sad and joyful times of ordinary life, punctuated with the extraordinary moments of life.

These moments exist for us both as individuals and families but also as a community of people choosing to come together to be about the work of deepening our own path of discipleship to Jesus Christ but also to take God's love and heart for justice out of our beautiful sanctuary in order to be an agent of God's transforming grace in the world. I love the privilege that ministry brings of being in communion with God's people as community.

While I know that our union with God and our spiritual growth can occur outside of a faith community, I also know that we need each other. To use the metaphor of the Body of Christ, we are a living body. As followers of Jesus, we aren't primarily a collection of individual seekers. Because there are times when we need the nurture of another's presence, and there are times when others are encouraged by our presence, we gather together, sometimes stumbling, to find our way to God and to find God's way for us. To build the Beloved Community that Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke so eloquently about, we need to gather together. We need to be able to worship together.

We meet God in a unique way in worship. That means that we as worship leaders and participants need to use our time on Sunday morning in ways that are creative, experiential and grounded in mystery as well as practical application. We have talked of other patterns of worship and possible other times for alternative worship expressions. Please let me, the Faith Ministry Team, an officer or anyone else you trust to get the message to us if you have ideas, suggestions, feedback, etc.

Because we meet God in community, there are no invisible members. Some people engage the

church and act out their commitment to our faith community or service to the broader community outside of worship. Yet, however we engage, our practice of being faithful is expressed by caring for one another and building trust and love together as Christ's body. There are other ways, to be sure, but our practice is grounded in being together in community.

My hope is that as this fall ripens into harvest, we might take some time to reflect on our habits concerning Sunday worship. How often each month do you come into community in worship? What strengthens your participation and what keeps you away? Are you at peace with this rhythm? Are there ways you wish to go deeper? We are not rigid about worship attendance. Yet, the more you are present the deeper our community can become in love and compassion. Ultimately, this depth impacts how well we love, serve and act for peace and justice.

Worship is where we learn how to practice living into the counter-cultural grace of Jesus. We practice being open to God's way of living in the world. Our nation is in the grips of fear and cynicism and a sense of powerlessness. We, as a people of faith, can offer hope and compassion; we can answer our call to love and to serve and to work for the wholeness of creation. But, as parenting has taught me, we cannot give what we do not have. As followers of Jesus, to give and love and serve, we need to nourish our faith and drink from the well of hope before we can share it with another. While there may be other ways too, it all begins with worship in our tradition.

I don't say this to be a nag. I truly believe that sometimes rest and family time is the most restorative, nurturing act a person can take. And I understand how often Sundays are the only time for various other activities as well (remember, I did agree to let my son play on a travelling soccer team that will take him out of worship a few times in fall and spring; I do get it). I also believe, though, that God counts on people of faith to be God's arms, legs and heart in this world. Something about being salt and light?

Please reflect on what we can do to make worship a time of transformation and how your presence can help. In the meantime, let's nourish our awareness of awe and beauty and work together to practice kindness and compassion.

Wishing you God's peace,

Pastor Lynn