

Thursday Church Epistle

March 4, 2021

Hello Church!

It is good to be back at work. Once more, I want to publicly thank Deacon Susan, Barbara, Darci, and Pastor Jeremy for making it possible for me to take a staycation kind of vacation and have it be a real vacation.

My travels were all time with family: lunch with a cousin in Brooklyn Center, a full day with my daughter and granddaughter, a run to Grand Marais to make a family visit with my aunt, and a last day walk through Como Park with John. Every night I slept in my own bed, grateful that I live here.

One thing still feels unresolved from the work time attached to this vacation. How will we resume gathering on our property for worship and fellowship between Easter and Christmas? My original dream of reopening with a hymn sing in a full sanctuary is not likely to happen. LORD willing, I would love to softly sing “Silent Night” with you in the sanctuary on Christmas Eve.

As a northern Minnesota native driving for family business, I experienced the fear that has gripped the North Shore. That day trip literally drove home for me how we as Christ’s followers must think about what comes next very carefully. People are so very afraid of the future.

We cannot go back to the past. We never could and we never will. That is not how God made us. For us time is always linear. Both choices and experiences in our past will always determine not just who we are today, but what is possible for us to do next.

My aunt is the last living member of her family of origin, and she has buried her son as well. In my studio I keep an old, framed picture taken on the last Christmas we shared. It was an exceptionally good holiday when I was 15. Kristi, her daughter, brought her fiancé. Someone realized that not only did we not know when we would all be together again; we also did not know if we would be together again. Kristi was getting married, and my aunt’s son was graduating from UM-Duluth. Grandma, the oldest among us, was very old at 76! So, we pulled the sofa out from the wall, put Grandpa and Grandma in the middle of us all, and Kristi’s fiancé took my treasured photograph of a blessed day in our past.

Now only 5 of the 12 of us in the picture are still alive. My aunt would rather be in heaven with Uncle Ray than widowed and the last of her generation. The middle-aged woman with the perfectly coifed hair and polished nails she once has gone through time and arrived in a hard time of life. I hurt to not be able to polish her nails or to brush her hair more to be the way she used to like wearing it.

Do I really want to go back in time with my aunt? I think not, although an ability to do a home manicure along with lifting pictures of my grandchildren would be nice for both of us while we wait together for her future. The suffering has gone on long enough.

What then does this mean for our mission as a local church? I am not the only person for whom the near future holds an end of life goodbye. My aunt is not the only person in elder care who would rather go to bed tonight and wake up in heaven tomorrow. Our church newborns when COVID began are now toddlers. Would we want them to go back in time?

This past year we have all matured. We have all also made it through social isolation. Some more isolated than others to be sure, but if you are reading this epistle you too have made it through this hard time.

Who are you now? There are so many rhetorical questions to go with that question, but one answer holds true for us all. You are a person who has survived a global pandemic through the judicious use of social isolation. Your near future includes figuring out how you will return to being a social person as you are now, not as you were last year. As your church, we need to support you. As a member of our church, you need to support other members as well. To that end, as a church we will need to begin new ministries and resume old ones.

What comes to my mind on this question from Scripture is the Old Testament history book, Nehemiah. Nehemiah was a leader among the Jewish people at the end of the exile in Babylon. There are parallels between him leaving a life in exile and us leaving a life in social isolation. At the beginning of Nehemiah's story, he has just learned of the suffering in Jerusalem that followed its destruction by the Babylonians. Nehemiah is moved to tears by the report. He prayed, "'Lord God of heaven, great and awesome God, you are the one who keeps covenant and is truly faithful to those who love you and keep your commandments. Let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant, which I now pray before you night and day for your servants . . .'" (Nehemiah 1:5,6 CEB)

Brothers and sisters, shall we too pray?

Looking forward to the year ahead!

Rev. Dawn