

## **President's Note for March 2021**

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Psalm 23 KJV

As I write this column for our March newsletter we have just gathered physically as a congregation for the first time in months. How good it was to be together again with friends and fellow believers. We know that wherever we are and that however we assemble, be that online, by phone, or in person, our Lord is with us. Yet, there is something truly special and reassuring about gathering together physically in worship and in fellowship. As Pastor Townsend relayed in his sermon, yes, we are now in the season of Lent; a time of self-denial, isolation and reflection. With COVID precautions it has often seemed like we've been in the season of Lent for the best part of a year. The lines above from the Twenty-third Psalm that I open with were a comfort to the older woman Pastor James spoke of visiting a half century ago and are a comfort to us today as they always are, particularly in times of trial and stress, like we all inevitably experience in the valleys of life.

Over this past year, our Lord has called a few of our members to their eternal home and some have found other earthly sanctuaries for worship and spiritual fulfillment. May God watch over them and us as we give thanks for His blessings and for our time together. Together is a key word. While each of us has a very important personal relationship with Jesus Christ, as a church, as the body of Christ and God's people, we exist and are defined and blessed in terms of community. We may be small in number, but are big in our faith. Church leaders and church scholars have

spoken of the essential need for community from the roots of our existence. Here at St. Paul's we've been particularly fortunate to have had a couple of very insightful and shepherding interim pastors lead us during periods of transition. Pastor Eugene Jewell and Pastor (Father) Michael Kerrick helped guide us through some out of the ordinary times and both stressed the importance and need for community. Pastor Khader Khalilia, who has family ties to Bethlehem, personal insight to the ways and values of the Holy Land past and present, and who served with us several years back also spoke of the inherent need for community. A central theme all of these pastors stressed was, as I've intimated, how God sees His people collectively, as a community of faith: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." Matthew 18:20 NRSV What was true then remains true today. Let's never fail to remember that eternal truth. As the well known and much loved hymn 748 in our Blue Book With One Voice relates: "Bind us together Lord." May the cords never be broken.

Having just spoken fondly of a few pastoral leaders from years gone by I would be remiss to not offer a big thank you to our own Pastor James Townsend for shepherding us, with a brief gap or two, through more than five decades of ministry. Thank you Pastor Townsend, particularly for this past year where, because of the pandemic, you've gone from presenting one sermon a month to one every week, mostly via our YouTube Channel. Pastor Townsend has been a reassuring constant during a year of change and challenge. So, what will worship look like moving forward? Well, I suppose going through what we have for the last year, one thing we've learned to expect is to expect the unexpected while simultaneously remaining firm in faith, flexible with plans and with the implementation of those plans. That said, barring any unforeseen new developments, we anticipate returning to gathering together physically on the near horizon. Certain questions remain

though, like, will worship be indoors or outdoors? Will we have a traditional coffee hour? When and how will we return to our rotation of clergy? The answers to these questions and others remain a bit cloudy for now, but with vaccines being administered, spring on the way holding its promise of improving weather, and with COVID-19 case numbers starting to decline, God willing, we should be able to return to gather again before too long, as we did very successfully on the first Sunday of Lent. You'll receive e-mails and written notes on what is forthcoming. With cautious optimism, we anticipate and look forward to being together to celebrate on Easter Sunday. Thanks be to God!

Continue to pray. Pray for rain and snow here in California. Be bold and also pray for clear, calm, warm days on Sundays for outdoor worship when and where appropriate both for us and for other congregations. Pray for those who struggle. Pray for those who've suffered and are suffering, particularly in Texas and hard hit parts of the Midwest. Pray for all in need. Pray for our nation. Pray for our world. Pray for our little church. Pray always. Give thanks.

March brings St. Patrick's Day and that holiday leads me to remember my paternal grandmother Margaret McNelly Prewett. As you'll undoubtedly deduce from the middle maiden name, my dad's mom's side of the family has ties back to the Emerald Isle. Not too long ago, for my own amusement, I purchased a simple little Irish penny whistle making a point to purchase one genuinely made in Ireland. I'll attempt to learn to play it as best my clumsy, shaky fingers and lack of musical training and talent allow. So far my results are more like Stan Laurel fidgeting with his tie while crying than like Paddy Moloney of the Chieftains playing a tin whistle. On that note, pardon the puns, I'll conclude this month's message with this comforting, well known Irish blessing:

May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind be always at your back. May the sun shine warm upon your face; the rains fall soft upon your fields and until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of His hand.

**Amen...Sláinte Mhaith, \***

**Chuck Prewett**

**Church Council President**

**\*An Irish/Gaelic toast to good health**