A Transfiguring Call

The month of February features a turn in the liturgical calendar from the season after Epiphany to the season of Lent. The hinge between these two seasons is Transfiguration Sunday, which we observe on February 14th. On this day each year, we hear about how Jesus brought a few of his disciples up a mountain and was transformed before their eyes. It’s an important story as we leave behind the shining seasons of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany and turn our faces toward the ashes of Lent, because it gives us a glimpse of the resurrection glory that awaits beyond the cross that looms at the end of the season to come.

The word “transfiguration” means a change in shape, or appearance. In the story of Jesus’ transfiguration, his clothes become dazzling white, his face shines like the sun, and two prophets appear to speak with him. His disciples are terrified and hide their faces, and when they look up again they see Jesus, alone and back to his old self. The irony of the transfiguration is that even though Jesus returns to his original appearance at the end of the story, the disciples will never see him the same way again. They have witnessed the heavenly glory of God revealed in their friend and teacher, and it changes something within them as well.

That part of the experience of discipleship is something that continues today: Whether we encounter the glory of God in the waters of infant baptism or through other experiences in life, when we are able to see Christ, nothing is ever the same. As Christians, we are called to respond by taking part in helping to transfigure the world, so that the heavenly glory of God is revealed through our actions.

Which sounds like a pretty tall order. It’s one thing to name places where we long for divine change—rifts in our communities, the toll of the virus, the availability of vaccines, the oncoming challenges in the economy or ecosystem, our personal struggles—but quite another to bring it about. No one person can surmount any of these things on their own.

But God does not call us to transfigure the world on our own. Through the peculiar wisdom of the Holy Spirit, people from all walks of life are called together into the Body of Christ to face these challenges together. And perhaps the difficult times that we are experiencing presently can serve as a reminder that the part that God calls us to play in transfiguring the world is not necessarily one of grand gestures. It consists of small acts of compassion, kindness, forgiveness, and mercy each and every day. Christ frees us to be agents of healing and empowers us to speak words of reconciliation. Little by little, the glory of God is revealed in this world being made new by God’s love.

Our friend the Apostle Paul puts it this way: “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.” (2 Cor. 5:17-19)

At this moment, our ministry of reconciliation, of transfiguration, looks different than at any other time in our life together as the people of Grace and Peace. Our worship practices have changed, our meetings and shared work must take different forms, the needs of our wider community have shifted. In this season when we must fast from the normal rhythms of our church, what does it mean to be the Body of Christ? How might we bear witness to God’s will for us through our actions in the world outside of church? How do we build one another up in the absence of physical presence?

These are not small challenges, but with the help of God, we continue to face them together—for the fundamental truth about our connection to each other remains the same, and Christ is with us even now. As we continue to bear witness to the power of God that brings about divine change, may we hold each other in prayer, that we might have the grace to continue sharing God’s love in our words and deeds. Amen.

Yours in Christ, Pastor Mary
Grief and Grace:  
A Lenten Worship and Fellowship Opportunity  
*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.* —Matthew 5:4

Grief is a human response to loss, and after the challenges of the most recent year, many of us may find ourselves coping with loss of many kinds. We all experience grief differently, but through the grace of God, we in the Body of Christ are able to walk with one another in times of sorrow. There may be no better time for such a journey than the season of Lent—the six-week period between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday. As a somber season commemorating the time leading up to the death of Christ, it is a season that many people associate with mourning. But it is also a season that invites us to reflection and renewal, deepening our relationship to God as we make the Lenten passage from death to resurrection.

Throughout the season of Lent this year, we will be exploring the topic of Grief: What it is, what to do with it, how to live with it or move through it, and how God meets us in it. Each Wednesday in online worship, we will dwell together in a passage of Scripture that explores one of these themes as we join in prayer and song. In addition to worship, each week will include an opportunity for you to process on your own through short activities designed to aid you in your own experiences of loss. And if you would like to share your Lenten journey with other members of the Grace and Peace community, there is also an option to gather with a small group (via Zoom) each week for prayer and support—please reach out to Michelle if you are interested in participating.

Worship services for “Grief and Grace” will be available beginning Wednesday, February 24.

**Ash Wednesday: Drive-Through Communion and Ashes**  
**Wednesday, February 17, 10-11 a.m. and 4-5 p.m.**

Lent begins on February 17. This Ash Wednesday, Pastor Mary will be offering prayer, the imposition of ashes, and Holy Communion outside the front entrance to the church—you don’t even have to leave your car! Pastor Mary will wear a mask, and we ask that you do as well. For your safety, bread and wine will be offered in pre-packaged sets.

There will be opportunities to participate in drive-through Ash Wednesday services in both the morning and afternoon. To help with the flow of traffic, please make an appointment with Michelle during one of these two windows: 10:00-11:00 a.m., or 4:00-5:00 p.m.

**Offering Envelopes**

Dear Grace and Peace members,

Each march when I get the bill for the offering envelopes for the current year, I am instructed to order envelopes for the next year which I do. Because of all the changes we have had in our giving in 2020, I find that only some people will want to use envelopes for 2021. I am trying to work out a numbering system so that I will probably only order 1/2 as many separate envelopes and assign them for 2022.

However, I do have the 2021 envelopes ready in the office. Anyone wishing to have theirs for this year can just call the office (309-693-8428) and arrange to pick them up. Thank you, Roberta Dietrich
WOMEN OF GRACE AND PEACE!

As you remember, all women of Grace and Peace are members of the Women of Grace & Peace; who are members of Women of Central/Southern Illinois Synod; who are members of Churchwide Women of the ELCA.

The pandemic has changed many things in our lives and it has certainly affected the Women of the ELCA. With giving down, they have had to move 8 of 10 staff members to part-time positions and have only two remain full time. The Winter Interchange from Women of the ELCA has more information about the changes to their budget and also more information about how Covid 19 has affected the Triennial Convention and Triennial Gathering. This is the last issue of the Interchange, but Bold Connections will continue and have information in it and is available at welca.org/publications by email.

The Just Love Gathering originally was scheduled for July, 2020. (postponed). And now, The Just Love Gathering scheduled for Aug. 5-8th, 2021 has been postponed (cancelled) and registration refunds will be offered. There will be some other virtual meetings in 2021 and 2022 to promote unity.

NEWS OF THE MONTH: The Twelfth Triennial Convention and Gathering will be held in Phoenix, Arizona the week of September 18, 2023.

Well, that's the news from Churchwide. No news from Central/Southern Illinois Synod at this time. No exciting news from the Women of Grace and Peace Board. We are all looking forward to being able to meet in person, plan exciting events for you, and seeing all of you at church.

In the meantime we leave you with this thought:

The Women's Board
Ann Joyce, Carol Gard, Pam Kovach, Deb Meyer
Prayer Partners

"He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again, as you also join in helping us by your prayers, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many." 2 Corinthians 1:10-11

Prayer connects us to each other and to God, and there is special power in praying with one another to ask for help in times of trial and to give thanks in times of joy. Our team of prayer partners has graciously agreed to try out their ministry in a new way: over the phone! If you would like to pray with one of our prayer partners, you are invited to use the contact list below to call upon a prayer partner at any time.

Linda Ericsson  309-231-5990  Carol Gard  309-678-0189
Terry Goff  309-357-3149  Sue Hughes  309-657-7465
Ann Joyce  309-253-1150  Andrew Loebach  815-343-3497
Deb Meyer  309-657-9841  Mary Whitledge  309-681-1176

Monday, February 1, 2021

LIONS AND BEARS

READ: 1 Samuel 17:19-37

Davis said, “The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.” 1 Samuel 17:37

For three years I faced one challenge after another. I was diagnosed with burnout and depression, and I had to give up my profession as a teacher.

Since then, I have had to deal not only with my recovery, but I have also struggled to pay rent, other bills, and even to buy groceries. However, God has taken care of my husband and me every time.

After each moment of uncertainty, I realized how much more I trusted God. Through each of these trials, I saw God strengthening our faith for the next challenge. We learned to be confident in God and God’s promises for our lives.

I think David might have felt the same way when he faced Goliath in the valley of Elah. Although David was a youth and an unseasoned soldier, God had been strengthening and training him as he tended his father’s sheep. God helped David protect the flock from the attack of lions or bears, and David learned to trust God. On the day of battle, David was confident in God’s ability to grant him victory against the Philistine champion.

With this lesson in mind, we can trust in God’s plan as we face our own lions and bears—or giants.

Madeline Twooney
North Rhine—Westphalia, Germany

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY: God can use my adversities to strengthen my faith.
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Grace and Peace Lutheran Church
Church Council Meeting
January 21, 2021

Present: Pastor Beenken, Diane Page, Terry Goff, Nan Goff, Cheriz Kunkel, Andrew Loebach, Craig Lorentz, Deb Meyers, Roberta Dietrich
Not Present: Pam Bebber

Dwelling in the word: Nan Goff & Terry Goff

Minutes approved: Motion to approve minutes by Nan Goff, second by Andrew Loebach, voted to approve.

Old Business / Ministry Reports

- Finance/Budget Updates: Income from 2020 was close to what expected, and exceeded expectations.
- Property Committee: Sign updates- installation soon, tech & programming
- Annual Meeting: Sunday, January 31st at 10:00 am. Zoom link/ call -in option
  - Audit Committee (Jennie Wineland, Julie Smith, Jack South): Terry Goff motioned to re-approve the committee for a second year for 2021, second Craig Lorentz, Council approved.
- Covid Discussion: Small Groups under 10 participants while following Covid guidelines. Drive-Thru Communion available by appointment with Pastor.
  - Ash Wednesday: Drive thru Communion & Ashes also available by appointment (more info coming)
- Stewardship: 2nd round of responses returned, members appreciated the Thank you note.
- Removing Personal Information from Website
- Updates to Membership: Pastor is working to update all the lists.
  - 110 confirmed members listed, plus 12 not confirmed (non-voting), 83 active members.
  - Motion by Andrew Loebach to remove the list of members that Pastor presented from the membership list, second by Diane Page, council approved.

New Business

- Andrew gave a Seminary Update
- Elections/ Upcoming Poll Places: Feb 23rd
Communication & Thank you’s to congregation, etc.

Treasurer Report – Sign Donations & remaining balance discussion

Pastor’s Time- Pastor Beenken

President’s Time- Diane Page

Adjourned with Lord’s Prayer

Council Reminders

Next Executive Meeting (TBA) Feb 11th  5:00 PM
Next Council Meeting – Feb 18th 6:30 PM
Annual Meeting: January 31st  10:30 AM
Dwelling in the Word: Cheriz Kunkel & Andrew Loebach

Ministry reports should be written every month and distributed in advance of the council meeting to the church office manager.

Pastor Beenken       pastor@graceandpeacelutheran.org
Pam Bebber           (2020-2021) 1st      Stewardship
Nan Goff             (2019-2021) 2nd
Terry Goff           (2020-2022) 1st   Vice President/ Finance
Cheriz Kunkel       (2020-2022) 1st    Secretary
Andrew Loebach       (2019-2021) 2nd   Christian Ed/ Youth
Craig Lorentz        (2019-2021) 2nd   Property
Deb Meyer            (2020-2022) 1st   Worship & Music
Diane Page           (2019-2021) 2nd   President / Nurture
February
Jim Claude, Ronald Groth, Lauren Huskings, Cheryl Rauhaus, Hannah Shirven, Lana Staelens

March
Ken Armstrong, Barbara Purple, Addisyn Smet, Brian Smith, Gary Smith, Laura Tomblin