

Holiday Greetings Church Family,

I am sitting at my desk while the Turkeys cook for tomorrow's Thanksgiving drive-through meal. They smell so good. I should probably have a bag of peanuts or something.

At least it smells like the holidays, like Thanksgiving. But truth be told, it is not much feeling like it. You know what I mean. I read the news a little while ago and the US has set a record for deaths due to Covid-19. One person is passing into eternity every 40 seconds now in our country. And in two weeks, after all the Thanksgiving gathering, "timebombs," have been realized we should be breaking today's horrific record. One official said something like "Please don't have a Thanksgiving celebration followed by a Christmas funeral." My hopes and my prayers are that you all stay safe this holiday season and remain vigilant until the long-awaited vaccine arrives. Please, stay safe!

Now if I can impose upon you a task, I would ask you all to begin to think about what we have learned in 2020. What have we learned about the world? What have we learned about each other? What have we learned about ourselves? What have we learned about God? Don't just think about these questions, write the answers down. When tragedy strikes a life, big or small, often the only good to come is that of life lessons learned. I have no doubt whatsoever that God wishes to teach us deeply when this evil pandemic has run its course. What is the Spirit of Christ telling the church now? Will we be different when we gather for worship in months to come? I hope so. I hope this forced vacation away from worship has truly made our hearts grow fonder. Isn't that what absence is supposed to do? I hope when we gather again, we will have a depth of appreciation for the simple act of gathering as the body of Christ. I hope we will sing with more sincerity, listen with more intention, and be moved by the realization of our actual spiritual connection. It has always been true you know. We are the body of Christ, sisters, and brothers from here to eternity. I hope the reunion we have next year will be long, and the casual decisions we have made in the past about worship attendance will suddenly become a passion, a thing we know we cannot, should not, will not, live without.

The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews, in a time of persecution (which is not unlike a time of pandemic), reminded the body of Christ to keep meeting whenever and wherever possible –

*"And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near." NLT Heb. 10:25* That word "encourage" is one of the most important words in the scripture. In Greek, it is "parakaleó." It means to "come alongside – to comfort – and yes to encourage. It is also the word we find in the Gospel of John when Jesus tells us I will send a comforter to you, the very Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the "Paraclete." Why all the emphasis on comfort and encouragement in the scripture? Simply because God knows we need it, especially now when this virus is peaking and we hunker down in prayer that our loved ones are safe. Oh church, be smart, be safe, and let us all be together when we can. I imagine that Hebrews 10:25, the 2020 version would say it like this "Do not forsake the gathering together on ZOOM as some people do, but encourage one another especially now..." Trust, learn, and be at peace!

Grace and Peace

*Pastor Craig*