



FROM: THE DESK OF PASTOR CARUANA
TO: The People of Zion
DATE: July 20, 2020

SUMMER 2020 **TOGETHER WHILE APART**

As I write these words, I am focused on the ways the coronavirus is impacting our ability to experience community. We can't be with one another in the ways we've come to expect and that's hard, difficult, and painful.

We can't shake the hand of a friend or give a hug. We can't gather for a spontaneous cup of coffee or meal at our favorite coffee shop or restaurant. Relatives in assisted care facilities can't see their children or grandchildren. In some cases, spouses in these types of facilities are isolated from one another. We worry about the health of those we love.

At Zion, we haven't been able to gather together for worship surrounded by our brothers and sisters, joining our voices together to praise God. We haven't been able to catch up over a cookie and coffee before or after worship. We haven't been able to receive communion: "The body of Christ, given for you. The blood of Christ, shed for you."

We miss and hunger for the type of in-person community which, if we're honest, we may have taken for granted in the past.

And yet ...

And yet, in the midst of all of this, we are finding ways to stay connected. Virtual meetings are replacing meetings that have typically happened in person. Families are finding ways to convene video conferences to stay in touch. Calls and emails and social media correspondence are becoming lifelines to reinforce the relationships we share.

And even if we can't gather physically together in our sanctuary, we are still connecting through our weekly Sunday morning video service, through Zoom Wired Word classes, through pastoral reflections sent out via email, through updates from Anne Rankin, through phone calls with each other, letters from our Council President, by dropping off food for Zion's food drive, and other offerings that are springing up as we creatively try to reinforce, celebrate, even strengthen the beautiful community we share at Zion Lutheran Church. Through all of these, we are discovering new ways to "be together" even while we're apart.

Paul, while imprisoned and away from the Christian community at Philippi, wrote them to tell them how much he missed them all: "*For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus.*" They were part of his community. Part of his family. And he grieved that he couldn't, at that moment, be with them.

He recognized, though, that his imprisonment -- his distance from them -- was actually helping to accomplish God's work. "*I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel.*"

Do not misunderstand me. I don't for a moment wish that any of this has happened. I miss all of you. I long to see you face to face. I look forward to the day when we can gather together again as God's people to raise our voices in prayer and song.

Until that day, though, I pray that God is already at work in us, already at work in you, to strengthen the relationships we have with one another and with God.

I pray that when we do come back together, we will be stronger, not weaker. I pray that we will be closer to one another than we have ever been. I pray that we will be ready to share God's love in new and unprecedented ways just as we are living through new and unprecedented times. And I pray that we will be so filled with gratitude for the amazing community we share and miss so deeply that we will never take it for granted again.

May God's grace and peace be with each of you. Have a blessed summer and stay cool!