



Pastor's Wednesday Reflection - July 15, 2020

Today's message is intended to be more informational than inspirational. Since it has been a good four months since we have been together physically, it occurred to me that it might be well to update our faith family on some of what we are continuing to work on here as the Pandemic continues to radically alter our life together – or not so together - as the case may be.

Our council met virtually last evening to touch base on where we stand as a congregation and make some needed decisions. Among other things, we learned, that we are incredibly blessed financially. While we are not setting the world on fire with our total financial contributions, we are doing quite well, especially given the unprecedented circumstances. For the first half of the year our revenues have almost exactly matched our expenses.

At one level, this means that we have been able to meet all of our obligations, service the mortgage, pay our staff and continue our (largely virtual) ministry. But at a deeper spiritual level, it means that you have shown faithfulness in your response to God's goodness and a wonderful commitment to the long-term mission and ministry that we share. In a time when many congregations and other entities are struggling desperately, we've been stable and strong. Thank you Lord...and thank you members of Trinity!

As our council considered our congregation's blessed circumstance, our attention turned to our ministry partners who have not been so financially fortunate in this time of the pandemic. As these entities and agencies continue to do the holy work of blessing, comforting and supporting folks who are in need, many are facing terrible financial challenges. At the very time their services are most desperately needed, their funding has been strained and their ability to respond hampered. In any event, after lengthy discussion, we decided to share some additional dollars with a number of those organizations/ministries that have been our mission possible partners hoping to help them to continue to do their important work. I am so proud of our leadership for stepping up in faith and resolving to bless those who bless others! It is a way for us, even in the midst of COVID, to extend the love of God to the vulnerable. It is what Jesus would do.

On an unrelated topic, I shared with council last evening that I had heard from Bishop Makabe Rakuba of the Central Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa (ELCSA). He wrote to express regret that the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic had derailed progress on our partner synod/ partner congregation work.

(You may recall that a trip was planned this spring (and subsequently cancelled) for a contingent of Metro Chicago Synod members (including a representative from Trinity) to travel to South Africa to meet our brothers and sisters in Christ in South Africa.) In addition to the Larger Synod to Diocese level connection, the intent was to set up congregation-to-congregation relationships between South African and Chicago Churches. For the Dozen or so participating Metro Chicago Synod congregations (of which Trinity is one) Bishop Rakuba has assigned partner ELCSA congregations. Trinity is now officially linked with Protea Parish, led by Pastor Lwazi Masina! We look forward to first contacts and to the building of relationships and understanding between Trinity and the Protea Parish in advance of a trip to South Africa some time in 2021. (This will, of course, depend upon where we stand with respect to the virus.)

As we seek to build relationships of love and understanding with our African Brothers and sisters overseas, we are painfully aware of the fact that relationships with some of our African descent brothers and sisters here at home are fractured and broken. In response to the several tragic encounters of Law enforcement with people of color (including the George Floyd Incident) and the intense discussions and national debate over racism that followed, I have been offering two group opportunities for the discussion of racism and racial justice from the standpoint of faith. Between the two groups, we've had twenty-three or twenty-four folks involved. The men's group will be starting a new six-week racial justice study as a follow on to the first four-week offering. The second group of twelve participants, co-facilitated by Julie Yandell, will meet for the third of four sessions this coming Thursday evening. There have been preliminary discussions around the possibility of drawing the two groups together and perhaps sharing with council some thoughts and recommendations regarding Trinity and our role in the struggle for racial justice for their consideration. I have to say that it gives me great joy to see this number of folks involved in meaningful discussion around faith and racial justice!

I know that many of us continue to long for the opportunity to gather together with brothers and sisters in Christ in the flesh to give thanks and praise to God. While there are no near-term plans for the resumption of in-person worship within our building, we are seeking to improve the online experiencing of our Sunday morning worship. To that end, a task force on digital worship will meet for the first time tomorrow. The group includes a number of skilled folks with wonderful expertise. I trust that the end result of our efforts will be clearer more consistent sound, a more compelling visual presence and, hopefully a more powerful worship experience. We are most blessed to have such skilled folks among us!

While Synod and CDC guidelines continue to recommend virtual gatherings as the safest way to come together for worship during the pandemic, we are going to be planning some outdoor in-person, socially-distanced but spiritually intimate worship experiences. Our planning group meets this Friday. We'll let you know soon when those opportunities for outdoor worship will be. I look forward to the possibility of worshipping with you in person with joy and thanksgiving!

In the important but not terribly exciting category, you should know that we are using this unusual time frame to re-think our digital tools and digital presence. Another task

force led and facilitated by Jes Sherborne has been at work looking at data base tools, website platforms, online giving and financial tools. The hope is to end up with greater efficiencies, higher utility, and greater ease of use. As I said, it may not be the most exciting news, but it is important stuff and I am thankful for the efforts of those who are bringing their skills to bear on these issues

While many of you probably crave concrete news about our life together as a congregation, I can't share that with you. I can, however, share with you some asphalt plans. Council has authorized the completion of repair to our parking lot beginning as soon as August. The hope is to forestall further erosion of our parking lot with timely maintenance and thereby significantly extend its serviceable life. By the time we gather again in our building, whenever that may be, the holes and cracks should be gone!

As we move deeper into summer, educators and administrators are wrestling with the question of how to do school in a safe and effective way this fall. Spikes in infection rates across the country have left school planners in a bit of a quandary. The same is true here at Trinity as we contemplate the start of our program year and think about Sunday School, Confirmation instruction and youth group. We have not yet put together firm plans with respect to these programs and do not, at this point, know what these ministries will look like. What we do know for sure is that Lauren is on it! We're most blessed to have her on staff, and I trust in her wonderful creative and organizational abilities and her deep concern for our children and families, knowing that she'll work to create meaningful faith conversations and experiences for our youth and families tailored to our very unusual times. We are most blessed!

I am aware that, having started down this path of sharing all that we are doing and planning, that there's much more I could tell you about. Suffice it to say that in spite of the strange circumstances, our work continues, planning goes on, serving, loving, forgiving and sharing goes on. We are incredibly blessed as the people of God... and we continue to be a blessing to others.

I said at the beginning that this was not so much an inspirational piece as an informational one. But the truth is, when I see how you have continued in your faithfulness, how we have been blessed and continue to seek to bless others, how we are reaching out in faith and embracing the doing of justice.... Well, you all have inspired **me**. It makes me want to sing with the Psalmist "***Praise the Lord! I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation.***" (Psalm 111:1)

Pastor Brown