

Dear friends in Christ,

4-8-2020

Grace to you and peace from God, our creator, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

May Holy Week lead you to the foot of the cross where you can see again what Jesus has done for you. But don't stop there, move along with the women to the empty tomb, where you will be shocked with them by the light that shatters all darkness! For God who is faithful raises Jesus from the dead. Set free! A new day! A time to start over. A time to share good news, marvelous news. **Christ is risen; He has risen indeed!! This Light is our salvation, our life, and our joy. Nothing can separate us from this Love!**

Now, you and I are also raised from the dead. The virus may have stopped us for a while. But we will rise from the confines of our homes to the rebirth happening outside our doors. Without any effort on our part, spring is blossoming forth! We see it! We hear and smell it. And soon we will taste it and feel it surrounding us – God's design - life coming out of death! Open your eyes and your hearts, dear people of God. Easter is here. This same story every year, yet brand new. How is new life showing up in your house and your backyard today? How is God's light shining? What is giving you hope; what good news do you have to share?

Good news: I thank my God every time I remember you: in prayer, on Facebook, on video camera, as we connect on phone calls. Although I live far away, technology has allowed many good conversations and new ways for me to be pastor. Thank you for sharing FB messages, devotions and prayers with me. I even received 2 face masks in the mail from one of you! Thank you for keeping Phil and me in your prayers.

Many of us have worshiped together **on Facebook, YouTube or Redeemer and Zion websites. Tune in for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter.** Pastor Phil and Pastor Sharon will share leadership each of those evenings live around 7: pm. You can also watch any of those 30-minute services at any convenient time for your family. **There will be a children's message early on.** We appreciate your feedback and prayer requests online or call me 715-507-0618.

Thank You: Our "church" is still active, just deployed! You are the church, God's people living out your lives for the work of Jesus Christ. **Thank you for staying at home for the sake of others,** for sewing masks, for teaching your children, for sending cards and well wishes to people who are alone, for praying for the well-being of our front line workers, for washing your hands with diligence and regularity, for getting groceries for our most vulnerable, for getting take out from local businesses, for tending to your yardwork, for cutting people slack in these uncertain times. God bless your conversations, the easy and the hard ones - as you live in close quarters and/or in separation from those you love. **Thank you for the ways you bring hope to others!!** And thank you for risking sharing your feelings with each other; this is a time of vulnerability and intimacy, which although difficult and exhausting, may be the greatest gift God gives – new life; new beginnings as God resurrects our love for each other. **Be still, rest, listen to your body, tend to your soul, take heart in God's word.** Pull out that Bible, read the Psalms and the Gospels. Sing and dance, too. Laugh!

What's life like as a pastor in a pandemic living far from her churches? The last thing I wanted to do was to stay at home so far from you! This early stage of sharing ministry with our 2 congregations is crucial for building trust. That takes many conversations and sharing our stories and faith. This "in person" contact has been stolen from us for the time being. It makes me sad to have this set back. I will be back! I am so grateful, though, for the many connections I have with Zion and Redeemer virtually. Keep sharing your likes and loves on FB as will I.

Your church presidents and I have had long phone conversations regarding decisions to refrain from worshipping together and about how to do Holy Week and Easter. We decided that we will follow the lead of our Bishop and our Governor which have both directed us to shelter at home. This we felt is the most compassionate move for our vulnerable and for the sake of slowing the spread of the virus. Although we hoped to be together in April, we are realizing this separation may last longer, into May at least. We will celebrate and let you know as soon as we know the time we can gather again at church. **Please call, text, message me privately, or e-mail me with any concerns or pastoral needs. I do care and I do respond promptly.**

My workday is filled with worship preparation for Sunday and special services. It takes a bit longer as we figure out the technical challenges and co-leading. I meet weekly on two Zoom meetings, one with the Bishop and Synod colleagues to discuss new ways to do church as unprecedented questions arise, and one with pastors to study our weekly texts together. The treasurers and I have talked about continued giving. Please send your offerings to:

Zion - Jan Thompson P.O. Box 238 Wittenberg, WI 54499

Redeemer – attention Peggy Hartleben P.O. Box 220 Wittenberg, WI 54499

It has been my privilege to call most of our homebound, 24 from Redeemer and 9 from Zion. I haven't reached them all yet. If **you** would like to have a conversation and share devotions and a prayer with me, I would be delighted. Please call with joys or sorrows.... Those of you who have friended me on Facebook know that I respond to your posts and send out many encouraging and faith filled messages. Several members have shared illnesses or deaths with me, for which I provide pastoral care. Know that each one of you are in my daily prayers. If you need more communication from me, please let me know. Trust can grow as each person leans into our relationship, even if for this short time, it is from afar.

Personally: Like you I am full of emotions in this time. Phil and I long to see our two sons. They have contacted us weekly and both are receiving a paycheck, so far. I have talked to 7 of my siblings, most doing fine, but 2 brothers live right outside of Detroit, MI and Austin, MN, two hot spots. I will call my niece Holly today; her husband just died. Phil and I enjoy each other's company, except when we get in each other's way. We stopped house hunting, except when our realtor calls with a "can't pass up house." More on that later... Worries, yes, but all will be well. **We take heart that God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble. Psalm 46:1 May this Easter at home be full of amazement! God bless you with surprises that give you renewed faith, life, and joy!** Pastor Sharon sfoxbogen@gmail.com