

March 12, 2021

Dear Church,

A year ago this week we made the decision to move our worship and congregational life to a virtual setting. It was one of the first, and I imagine will remain one of the hardest, decisions I will make in my career as a pastor. Who could tell, when we began our work together early in 2020 that the year would bring both pestilence and plague. In the year since we gathered together in the sanctuary on 400 West...we have been witness to an unveiling. We have seen clearly the plagues of inequity, lack of adequate and accessible medical care, police brutality, white supremacy, the propagation of falsehood for the preservation of power, the manipulation of offices meant for service, and the devastation of political violence. And all of this with the ever present backdrop of a deadly virus, isolation and uncertainty.

About thirteen months ago, just prior to my installation as your new pastor, I wrote my very first Paper Pulpit article. In it I asked that as we looked ahead to the work which we would do together, we adopt a new mantra, a mindset to shape the coming days:

#### Practice, not Perfection

Little did I know when I proposed the idea what that phrase would come to mean or in what circumstances we would be asked to employ it. But employ it, we have.

This congregation is truly amazing. At every turn this past year, you have embraced the challenge of discovering and inventing what it means to be a church in a pandemic. You have kept open minds and hearts as both I and church council have sought to faithfully lead our community through trials and challenges. The fidelity you have exhibited in sticking together, showing up, looking after our neighbors and continuing to be stalwart pillars of the congregation is nothing short of extraordinary. Little we have done this year (if indeed anything at all) has been perfect, but we have done it together. We have sought to *practice* our faith, side by side, and I pray you might see this time, as I do, as among our finest hours.

Many of you have commented on how strange a first year in ministry this must be for me. Admittedly, it's not exactly what I was trained for. What has made it possible for me to carry on however, is this community. I could not imagine serving in this time, under these circumstances, with a more faithful, steadfast, compassionate, and loving congregation than Prince of Peace. Each of you have been a blessing to me this year, and it is *your* witness that strengthens me for the work.

Truly, we are *better together*.

God's Peace be with you all.

-Pastor Emily