

September 1, 2020

Dear Church,

Who knew that in the month of September I would still be writing this letter to you from my study at home instead of my office at church? Who knew that 6 months after we implemented social distancing protocols that we would still not be meeting in our building, that we would be concerned about outbreaks in schools and at USU? Who knew, back in March, we would be facing a summer of unrest and uprising that would confront us with issues of untold history and unresolved quests for equity and justice, that we would again face questions about who we have been as a nation and who we want to be? Certainly, not me.

And yet at the beginning of September in the year 2020, this is where we find ourselves. Our world has changed. Sometimes it reminds me of hiking in the Rockies...when you get to a certain elevation, you have to be prepared for the rocks beneath your feet to give way as soon as you take the next step, and navigating the terrain requires consideration, patience, and flexibility. We have navigated these new circumstances and ever shifting landscapes together, as a community, and I (for one) am proud of the dedication and faithfulness this congregation has demonstrated in continually moving forward and finding our way, even amidst uncertainty.

The truth is, navigating the changing landscape is a journey that I think we are far from completing. In the late spring and early summer, I think that many of us, including myself, had in mind a goal to “get back to normal” - meaning that we wanted to return to our worship and congregational life the way we had it in January and February. But one thing that has become clear to me as the months of pandemic and protest have unfolded is that we probably aren’t going back.

Now, before I startle anyone, let me reassure you that I don’t mean we will never worship in our building again or that we are throwing our patterns of liturgy out the window...that’s not it at all. We are a church steeped in traditions and rituals that reach back and connect Christians over time and space. We won’t be giving those up anytime soon. However, I do think that reimagining those traditions and reinterpreting those rituals for a contemporary context will be our work in the coming months and years. We are in a season of adaptation: we will likely always have an online component to our worship, we will continue to meet outdoors, we will need to find ways to assess the needs in our community and find out what it means to be good news to our neighbors. We have to look at the challengings facing our society and take seriously the work of proclaiming the gospel and working as co-creators with God, to bring God’s own beloved community into being. No, we can’t look back; the only way is forward.

This sounds overwhelming, even as I sit at my desk typing these words to you, but remember the promise in the letter to the Philippians, “I [we] can do all things through Christ who gives us strength.” We move forward, confident that whatever we do, we will do it together. Onward, my friends!

Peace,

Pastor Emily