

## July 2020 Pastoral Message

*"I lift my eyes to the hills – from where is my help to come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forevermore." – (Psalm 121 vv.1-2, 7-8)*

Dearest Neighbors in Christ,

Grace and peace to you, my beloved family, and friends! I cannot believe it is already July, can you? These past 100 days or so have been a long time for so many of us, including myself. But I am certain that times will be better sooner than later, this COVID virus will be sustained, and we can return to some kind of normalcy.

Speaking of normalcy, we have already begun again worshipping as a community. These past weeks we have joined together as one at Augustana Lutheran and First Lutheran in outside services. And if you are not aware, you are invited to the final parish wide worship service which will be held at St. John's in Bismarck this Sunday, July 5<sup>th</sup>. Yes, the worship has been different than the regular litany and hymns we are used to in our sanctuaries, but we are worshipping none the less. Lawn chairs and face masks are the norm right now but in the future we look forward to something different...being back in our respective churches and worshipping again.

It is my hope – and intention – that we will indeed be worshipping in our separate sanctuaries on July 12<sup>th</sup>. Now there may be some things to be get used to, but we will be there none the less. Masks will continue to be the norm, and physical distancing will be a must, but I do not want to play the physical distancing police; I will leave that up to you to use your best judgment where you want to sit. There is also the question of singing. Right now, I believe we will be able to sing and say prayers together with masks on. I would ask you to please bring your own personal protection to worship. Now on Holy Communion Sundays, I will continue to wash my hands and sanitize them with disinfectant prior to putting on gloves to offer you the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. I want to keep myself as clean as I can, and ask you to please do the same. This may be our new normal for a while, as the virus continues to spread, but I believe we will get through this together as one – as the Body of Christ into which we were baptized.

I chose this psalm for my message as a reminder that God is still with us, no matter where we are, or where we worship. It does not matter if we are outside in Creation, inside a building, or gathered as two or three together, our Lord is present in our lives – spiritually, physically, and mentally. Our help does indeed come from God Almighty who made heaven and earth, and you and I as well. I would ask you to consider this, and meditate on it if you can please make the time. This is one of my most favorite pieces of scripture in the entire Holy Bible and I look to it frequently for spiritual and emotional refreshment reminding me of the Triune God's presence in my life.

I look forward to seeing you all again real soon and pray for you often. May the peace of Christ be in your hearts. God bless you all.

Take care dear ones,

Rev. Erik Karlson  
Pastor, Neighbors in Christ Parish