

November 2020 – Pastoral Message

“Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the heavens. I will be exalted in the earth.” – Psalm 46:10

Neighbors in Christ,

Grace and peace to you, my family, and friends. It would be an understatement to say this year has been very weird. That is, there has been so much going on that it is sometimes difficult to keep track of it and seems as if the days are longer than they have usually been. Covid-19, distance learning for our youth in schools, a sometimes-trying election cycle, a quick spring, a hot summer, and now a cold and snowy October have had many of us question what has been going on. I enjoy the chillier months that is Minnesota, but to see five inches of snow and temperatures in the 30s during October is definitely something new – and a lot of us agree the same. This has been a weird year, indeed.

However, there have been so many positives this year as well. There have been many celebrations in our parish, and I want to highlight them as well. There have been milestone anniversaries and birthdays, confirmations for our youth, plenty of baptisms, and the availability of worshipping outside as a combined faith community. And now being able to worship back inside our respective churches as we enter into our new normal. Yes, we still distance ourselves from one another and wear face masks, but with adaptation comes the way of doing worship just a little bit different. And in my opinion, this has gone very well, and folks are ok with that. For those who choose to still stay away, I have been visiting with them and bring God’s Word and Holy Supper to them.

This month, I have chosen the beautiful poetry of the Psalms for my devotional message. Psalm 46 is a wonderful poem, written many, many millennia ago as a Jewish prayer remembering King David’s defeat of the Philistines. The prayer has themes referencing Jerusalem as the ‘City of God’ and that Christ will return and rule for over a thousand years towards the end of times. I take particular liking to the 10th verse about the exultation of heaven and earth, and that our loving God is everywhere...we just have to look for him in our lives.

This year, so much has occurred, and some have questioned whether or not God has abandoned God’s beloved people. I emphatically believe that God has not abandoned us; rather God has raised us up to be better than ever. Through our faith, given to us by the Holy Spirit coming from our one Holy Baptism, we are called to remember our Almighty and hold onto the fact that our God stands with us in our ups and downs. Whether it is a bad day, a test result that we choose not to believe, or a great loss taken from our lives, we still hold onto the embrace of the Holy Trinity not abandoning us...we are loved and nothing can separate us from the love, forgiveness, mercy, and life that God has bestowed upon us. It is up to us to relax, take

a deep breath, and remember that God is with us. 'Be still and know that I am God,' says our Lord, and we are called to exalt the heavens and the earth – all that is seen and unseen.

This month we wind down the church year and look toward the season of Advent, or the beginning, again. We are reminded of the Kingdom of God and how close it is for us, as Christ tells us from the Gospel According to Matthew. This Kingdom also reminds us that God is near, and we are to praise and worship the Creator. We will come together on the Day of Thanksgiving to reminisce about the great things in our lives that we have been given. Our families, our homes, the clothes on our backs, the fruitful harvest that has been brought in, and the vocations we have chosen are details in our lives we give thanks for. And these all come from God, who stands by us in times of peril and in times of celebration, and everything in between.

I encourage you this month to reflect on the positives and push away the negatives that surround us. The ever-present news cycles and 'bad news' that come with it can easily get us down. But alas, I challenge you to push those to the side and concentrate on the good. And remember that God is with us, always. Our God loves us unconditionally and that is what I am thankful for.

Bless you all and may God's peace continue to shine on you and be gracious unto you. Amen.

Rev. Erik R. Karlson
Pastor, Neighbors in Christ Parish

PS – **DON'T FORGET TO VOTE!!!**