

*“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” – Hebrews 13:8*

Beloved Neighbors in Christ,

Grace and peace to you, my family and friends, in the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I am looking out an open window on this beautiful September afternoon thinking ahead to the month of October and what it has in store for us. There is a comfortable breeze waving the still green leaves back and forth and the air smells refreshing. Cars and trucks race by on the road going to-and-fro, and I ponder where they are heading to or where they are coming from. And this is not the place I would like to be. You see, folks... I'm quarantined in my home for the fifth day after testing positive for COVID-19.

COVID has been no joke! The first couple of days made me feel like I was hit over the head with a canoe paddle, and I slept a lot. Yesterday afternoon and today are so much better but I am still very lethargic. Hopefully a great night of sleep will help remove the brain fog I have about me and tomorrow will be even better. I plan on testing again in the morning and if I am negative, then I'll try to get something productive done and prepare for the upcoming Sunday worship services.

As lovely as my view is right now, I would rather be in Alexandria, MN with my colleagues and wife though because this is the first full day of our SW MN synod's annual Fall Theological Conference. This is the first time they have met in over two and a half years. Friends and colleagues have come from across the synod landscape to offer longer than normal hugs, and even some tears, for friends and family that have not been seen in person for a long time. There are plenty of folks that I was hoping to see, but I guess my number came up last week and now I have to sit this one out. I will live vicariously through their pictures and texts until another appointed time. I do find joy though that they are meeting and are sharing in their own faith and support as ordained and consecrated pastors and deacons.

So where I am I going with this?...The leaves are still green, the temperatures are still warm, and the calendar continues to read September for the next week. But like so many things, that will change. The calendar will roll over to October, the leaves will turn, and the temperatures will drop. A trusted saint reminded me last week that it will probably be time to start taking the beans after next week. Soon enough we will see the combines rolling and the chaff being spread; harvest will be upon us and the lines and appointments at the elevators will be upon us.

But you know what? The message of Jesus Christ will not change. The gospel of love and salvation, of forgiveness and redemption, and of peace and eternal life continues. The words from the Holy Bible, perhaps a book in our homes that needs to be dusted off and remains to be opened, still reads true. The unknowing love of a man who came for us and died for us freely as a sacrifice for sin needs to be heard again. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews

got it right when ink met paper and was transcribed “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*” The message does not change to fit into the way we live our lives, rather Christ gave it to us to use throughout our lives and existence. The gospel stands the test of time and should be propped up for us to read and see... everywhere.

If anything, as we enter into harvest season, we need to hear that we are loved and that we are forgiven, again. We need to be reminded that a place has been prepared for us when we leave this earthly life and that it is our responsibility to repent of that which we have done wrong and make amends for doing so, again. To love God and to love one another is the basis of our shared faith. When we are called to bring in the harvest, we are also called to share our first fruits with one another. We give to others not because we have too, but because the example and love of Christ calls us to.

The word ‘harvest’ is used 80 times in the bible and each time it is mentioned it is done for the glory of God. So let us share in the message that Christ gives us, not only for the glory of God, but also as a reminder of that which we need to hear too! Let us share in that which gives us meaning and life, that which gives us purpose and truth, and that which helps push us forward and overcome that which sometimes defeats us. So whether it is not being able to see friends and family, a health setback, or anything...let us continue to remind ourselves that “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*”

I look forward to seeing you in-person or on-line for worship and also out in the community. If you would like to continue this conversation, or invite me to stop by, please get ahold of me and we can talk some more. I like my coffee strong and black. 😊

God bless you all and welcome to October!

In Christ,

Rev. Erik Karlson

Pastor, Neighbors in Christ Parish