

All the Prayers of God's People  
September 29, 2020

*Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. Romans 8:26-28*

It's a bit strange, really. This will be the last penned edition of "All the Prayers of God's People" for a while, so please forgive the length! For 6 months we have been walking through what it means to be in prayer with and for one another, in other words, how we live out this thing called life during a pandemic. For Tuesday's writing adventures, we will now have the privilege of celebrating Musings by Barry as we hear, seek and embrace God's call on our Spiritual journeys. I am ever thankful for Barry and his willingness to walk with God as a leader here at SOPC!

I feel that as we transition in simple ways, we should also acknowledge larger transitions that are worthy of our prayer and time. The world we are living in is full of these transitions and often they bring an element of grief to our reality. I pray this grief doesn't weigh on you heavily, to which this would be a blessing. I also pray in the way of supple hearts, that we might take time to consider the grief of so many around us and pray with and for them during this time.

The day I am penning this brings a memorial that within our country alone, over 200,000 lives have been lost to Covid-19, an unimaginable grief for families and friends and all God's people. Worldwide, our entire world loss is upwards of 1 million souls; friends, family members and children of God. On this very day, we have also buried Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, fighter for human rights. We also grieve the anger, violence and race battles occurring as well as the political arguments and especially we grieve the loss of relationships these cause.

Turning closer to home, we grieve the loss of ability to worship, to gather, to fellowship and to grow together. Within the church we have experienced this grief in both big and small ways. Some dear friends of our congregation are no

longer with us in presence and we grieve. The retirement of our former parish associate and new calling on our children and youth director means we grieve friendships in our midst. Perhaps we grieve the “way it used to be” or the loved ones we remember in the pews. This grief is real and needs to be named in order to move forward together in God’s call. I invite you during this time of quiet and for many, isolation, to grieve and ask God to lift these things from yourselves and from the life of the church. It is time to begin moving towards God’s vision here at SOPC.

It is right to acknowledge that this transition we are experiencing and the grieving process happens in and through our time together in worship. It is here where we stand at the throne of God and lay it down for God to pick up. By honoring this and grieving together, we can then begin to move forward. This will be part of the Covid-19 legacy for us.

We all know in the midst of Covid, this worshipping together in itself is a constantly changing transition! Whether you join in your PJ’s with a cup of coffee on YouTube or in the FH dressed to your best, God is present with us. But maybe, since we are talking about transitions, you wonder what is next in terms of worship. I’d like to take this moment to answer this query. Here is what we know.

1. There will always be room for alterations of plans. Covid-19 reality demands that the “best laid plans” be flexible. If someone is sick or contagious, including your staff or one another, then worship will resume to be by Zoom only. Likewise, the task force is discussing the “what ifs” of when we would say the viral load is too high and worship would not be a possibility any more. The task force is also beginning to get creative in this journey as well--worship may look a bit different each week and that is because God is at work among the members at SOPC! We are all trying to remember that flexibility is key!
2. This means that there will be experimentations in where and how we worship as the weeks progress, listening to the Spirit in our midst calling us to new things!
3. Worship will continue to be Zoomed and/or available online each week, for the long view. Through this, many of our members who cannot join in person are able to experience what we have termed “Narthex time” on Zoom. What a blessing!

4. The survey we sent out indicated that the majority of our congregation is not ready or does not feel safe to regather so Zoom worship will continue. If you would like to (and have not connected) via Zoom, please contact the office and our tech gurus will help you get set up!
5. In person worship will be held **every other Sunday**. This schedule provides everyone having a similar worship experience and also to have their individual worship needs met. Specifically:
  - a. The Fellowship Hall, outdoor space, eventually the sanctuary and alternative options for worship will be easy to clean/set up/change according to changing needs in attendance. We will ensure that there will be an easy one-way traffic both in and out of the space, meeting CDC recommendations.
  - b. We have less ushers and elders who are comfortable coming to in-person worship which is easily adapted to alternate worship environments.
  - c. There is projector capability in the Fellowship hall that allows our Zoom and in-person congregation to both be worshipping in the same way. We can interact with one another on this screen and all listen to the same music in the same environment. The sanctuary does not have this capability at present. Part of this experimental attitude will be to listen for the Holy Spirit in all “different” ways of worship.
  - d. When we are in person, we cannot sing according to all CDC and Covid-19 recommendations. Every other week worship allows for singing at home. This is critical because there is a large portion of our congregation who have a gift and love for music. Our worship services honor God in music and this gift should be celebrated regularly. We give thanks to Lloyd for providing stellar music during this time of constant change!
  - e. We plan to re-evaluate closer to Advent in order to determine next steps for our journey to the manger this strange year of 2020.

This is definitely a time of transition and the reality is that we all will need to grieve some things we have lost. I invite you to grieve and let those things go to our God who hears. Then together we will pray, together we gather, together we seek the power of the Holy Spirit in our midst, together we get to witness “See, I

*am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.” Isaiah 43:19. Let us pray.*