Easter

So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Mark 16:8

Every three years the lectionary cycle comes to the Gospel of Mark for the Easter account. Although the lectionary encourages the possible alternative of John (which it does not do on the other two years), as Mark has been seen as defective in some ways. There is no sighting of Jesus, simply an empty tomb. And the verse above, about fleeing, terror, amazement, and fear scholars feel is most likely the very last verse of that book.

Clearly they said something to someone ... otherwise we would not be gathering thousands of years and thousands of mile away from these events. However, this year, at the twilight of the pandemic, it has a closer impact. There has been a sudden and unexpected opening in our world in these days and our response to it is all over the map ... amazement, fear ... life going forward will be radically different than it has been over the last year.

How was life different after Easter then? How will it be different now? It will be about relationships. It will be about community. It will be about gathering together in Christ’s name in ways that are inclusive and equitable. It will be about putting Christ before our other loyalties. It will be about singing and sharing bread and wine. It will be about Life Together and the promise of life everlasting.

See you soon!

Rev. Matthew A. Smuts, senior pastor
"Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (John 12:24)

Last year, my daughter Henriette and I decided to abstain from sweets during Lent. Honestly, it was not so much my idea as hers. We were pretty serious about it—even with all the additional stress that COVID-19 and the lockdown brought with them. And we made it!

This year we wanted to do it again. We were both very motivated—and we promised to remind each other in case we fall back into old habits. The first two weeks were no problem. But then I felt it getting harder and harder… more stress, more time at home, less time and motivation to think about eating good meals … and I let it slip. I didn’t manage! Halfway during Lent, I admitted to myself that I had given up.

Was I disappointed? Honestly, at first yes. But I thought more thoroughly about this whole fasting thing. It’s just an exercise in self-discipline, isn’t it? I would experience that I could well live without additional sugar in my life. After the seven weeks, all sweets would be too sweet for me. I would have done my pancreas a favor. But: abstaining from sweets doesn’t make me a "better" Christian. It doesn’t deepen my faith, doesn’t make me feel closer to God. And it does not make the world a better place.

So yes, I am disappointed in myself, my non-existing self-restraint when it comes to sweets, and I feel that I failed. I failed myself and I failed God—but not in the same way. I failed myself in not being able to keep up my fast. But I failed God in starting it at all! Because wasn’t it an idle self-centered test to begin with?

So, next year, I hope to be able to engage more in activities that support the community. Hopefully this COVID-business will be mostly over by then. I am thinking about volunteering with Henriette once a week at places that do make a difference, that reach out to those who suffer and hunger, that spread God’s love in an active and visible way.

But: In the end, my failed Lenten experience taught me a lot. It taught me about my self-centeredness, it taught me about failing, and it taught me about learning. And though the verse in John 12:24 refers to Jesus’ death and resurrection and the promise of eternal life for us, I think it also fits for my experience: My idea of fasting had to die to be able to bear fruit.

In this sense: Happy Easter!  
Pr Friederike

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CONFIRMATION

How does Zoom Confirmation class go? Quite well, I think. Though it is of course not the same as being able to interact in-person, we’re able to talk about a lot of topics and even play games together. So far this year the confirmands worked on the topic of guilt and forgiveness, Holy Communion, the question of why do bad things happen in the world, if God is good (“Theodicy”), what happens after we die, the question if God exists, how to combine faith and science, the creed, finding humor in religion, and world religions.

And: Confirmation Sunday is coming up soon! On Pentecost, May 23, these five 8th graders will confirm their faith at the second service:

Joe Choquette  Tyler Hallada  Charlotte
William Guhr  Luke Hines  Lungren

If you are interested in confirmation at Grace or have questions about the program, please be in touch with me (pastorf@gracepa.org). Right now, the two confirmation classes for Middle Schoolers meet on Zoom every Wednesday from 4:30-5:30 and from 7:00-8:00.

WOMEN’S NIGHT OUT

Join in on the first and third Thursday of the month into our Zoom Women’s Night Out from 7 to 9 pm. The first meeting of the month is a purely social gathering, where we check-in, chat, and support each other. Please come and join at any time between 7 and 9, even if it is just for a couple of minutes!

On the third Thursday we’ll have a topic and speakers. If you have questions about the Women’s programming at Grace or have suggestions for speakers you would like to invite, send me an email (pastorf@gracepa.org).

LUTHER GECACHE ON GRACE CAMPUS

If you are looking for a great outside family activity, try the Martin Luther Geocache on our campus. I installed this treasure hunt that uses geo-coordinates and QR-codes to lead you to each of the 16 stations. Answering questions about Martin Luther will help you to figure out the coordinates to find the next station. All you need to do is this: Use this QR-code to get to the instruction slide, and read and follow the instructions prior to starting your adventure on campus! This game is recommended for families with Middle and High Schoolers, and grown-ups.

For questions shoot me an e-mail to pastorf@gracepa.org!
We often talk in the church about how Easter is not just a day, but a season that we celebrate for fifty days. I think that this year we will experience and celebrate resurrection in more ways than one! Yes, our annual celebration of Jesus’ return from death to life, and our own freedom from the power of death, is monumental enough to be worth celebrating for fifty days. But this year, we ourselves will also be emerging from what might feel like a year of entombment brought on by the global pandemic. The coronavirus is abating, and we are all feeling hopeful as more and more of our friends, family, and neighbors are receiving their vaccines. The first day of Easter may feel like the stone has been rolled away, the sun is pouring in, but we haven’t quite yet emerged. We are blinking into that sun, looking around, wondering, hopeful but maybe still a little fearful about what comes next. But as the next fifty days go by, I think we’ll be gaining more and more confidence with every passing day. May we experience and appreciate resurrection this year like we never have before!

So let us keep the festival to which the Lord invites us; Christ is the very joy of all, the sun that warms and lights us. Now his grace to us imparts eternal sunshine to our hearts; the night of sin is ended. Hallelujah!  

(MARTIN LUTHER, 1524, ELW #370 VS. 4)

Christ is risen! Shout Hosanna! Celebrate this day of days! Christ is risen! Hush in wonder: all creation is amazed. In the desert all surrounding, see, a spreading tree has grown. Healing leaves of grace abounding bring a taste of love unknown.

Christ is risen! Raise your spirits from the caverns of despair. Walk with gladness in the morning. See what love can do and dare. Drink the wine of resurrection, not a servant, but a friend. Jesus is our strong companion. Joy and peace shall never end.

Christ is risen! Earth and heaven nevermore shall be the same. Break the bread of new creation where the world is still in pain. Tell its grim, demonic chorus: “Christ is risen! Get you gone!” God the First and Last is with us. Sing Hosanna, everyone!

(BRIAN WREN, 1986, ELW #383)

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"...those moments were not in vain.
You are not the same. ...there is more to you
than yesterday." – Morgan Harper Nichols

One year of living life with COVID. I have caught myself on my worst mental health days telling myself that this year was wasted. I felt like I was living life on pause. I would tell myself that I haven’t done enough or used this time as well as I could have. I could have worked out and learned a new language! But then I remember that I survived. I stayed home and kept people safe. I saved lives. That is a big deal. We lived through a pandemic, wildfires and orange nighttime skies, quarantine, not seeing friends and family, losing loved ones, and an extreme lack of person interaction. I was so isolated, and felt so alone. I survived all of that, and so did you. It is no small feat. As Morgan Harper Nichols says in her poem, "those moments are not in vain." You are not the same as you were a year ago. You have changed and grown in big and small ways. It does no one any good to discount that. You lived. You survived. You made it. If that is all you did, that is enough. It is so hard in a work that rewards overworking and never taking a break, being so busy you don’t have time to stop and enjoy life. Jesus reminded his friends over and over again that he wouldn’t be around forever and they should slow down and enjoy life. He seemed to savor life: instead of rushing to clean, he encouraged Mary and Martha to sit and stay a while, to stop doing the busy work. I have a hard time with this, but this year taught me to slow down. There was so much I just couldn’t do. I couldn’t plan big youth trips and day camps. We aren’t ready for that yet. I couldn’t plan a habitat build internationally and spend months recruiting a team. Instead, I planted a garden, redid my outdoor space because that was the only place I could safely see friends. I learned how to bake bread and feed a sourdough starter. I spent time outside talking to my neighbors over the fence. We often talked about the trees, for the first time I was noticing them change with the seasons. I had never taken the time to notice that before. Over the past year I have watched our trees go through a full year cycle, losing leaves, starting to bloom, flowering, producing fruit… it is a slow growth, but I wasn’t busy being busy and I had time to notice it. Every night I soak in my inflatable hot tub (early quarantine addition to my patio) and I look up at the moon and stars. I’ve noticed how they move in different seasons as well. This year has been incredibly hard on so many levels, but it wasn’t a year wasted; it was a year slowed down. You are still growing, breathing, changing, and you are always surrounded by Grace. Things are getting better each day, slowly, so just hang in there and remember you are loved and enough just as you are.

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**SUNDAY SCHOOL** | Every Sunday 9am Zoom

We gather every Sunday on Zoom for all ages Sunday school with a lesson, a video, and learning all about Jesus with friends online. Our last Sunday school class for this season will be **May 23**. Hopefully we can return to in-person Sunday school in the Fall!

**HIGH SCHOOL** | Every Wednesday Zoom at 7pm

We know that everyone is Zoomed out, but we also know that community is vital. Every week, come lockdown or quarantine, we are gathering for Youth Group. Even if it’s only for 30 minutes, we gather to check in and pray. **We will return to in-person youth group after Easter!**

**SUMMER 2021**

We are planning a **Sunday School Family Picnic** in the Park on a Sunday after church this Summer. We can gather in our own family pods and spend time outside safe and distanced but together.

There will be a middle school **Bike Adventure Day** with fun all around town and a picnic lunch!

For High School Youth I am planning an **All Day Outside Activity-filled Day** with the potential of us camping out under the stars at Grace! Camp, but at Grace; it should be lots of fun. The high schoolers will help me plan this day! Please contact Elizabeth with any questions, or if you are planning to join us.

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Elizabeth Hood
Director of Children, Youth & Family Ministry

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CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILY

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Elizabeth Hood
Director of Children, Youth & Family Ministry
During the weeks following Easter, please prayerfully consider how we can reduce our environmental impact and be better stewards of God’s wonderful creation!

Here are some ways to help …

- **Volunteer to repair trails at Mt. Cross.** For more information, e-mail Mt. Cross at mtcross@mtcross.org or call 831.336.5179.
- **Print out NOAA’s Protecting Our Planet Starts with You (noaa.gov)** and put it up on the refrigerator!
- **Plant a Tree.** Check out the volunteer opportunities at Canopy Palo Alto at www.canopy.org
- **What Goes Where?** Learn about composting, recycling, and landfill in my own city. For Palo Alto residents, visit www.cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/pwd/zerowaste/whatgoeswhere/
- **Collect your single-use plastic containers** for a week to see how much you use.
- **Do a spring bike tune up** and ride somewhere one normally drives.
- **Clean up a creek.** Visit the South Bay Creeks Coalition for more information on volunteering at www.sbcleancreeks.com

What year is it? What month is it? What day is it? What day of the week is it? Even though we seem to be heading in the right direction after a very uncertain year, it is sometimes still difficult to be very confident about the details of the future. Through it all, Grace Lutheran has been a constant in our lives, and there is certainty about Grace Lutheran in our future.

So, as usual, the pledge campaign is in the near future. Grace Lutheran is 100% self-supported, and our dollars that we pledge go to operating the church (to keep the lights, Zoom, and You Tube on), funding children’s programs (Sunday school, confirmation class – even virtually), Mission giving, and Staff salaries. We want to thank our staff at Grace for quick and very adaptable work. Their attention to the congregation in ways never dreamed of has been amazing!

Please keep in mind the following dates:

- **Sunday, April 18 | Pledge Campaign Kickoff** including an Adult Forum on stewardship
- **Monday, April 19 | Pledge packets** and associated instructions arrive in your mail
- **Sunday, April 25 | Pledge Sunday**

Thank you for your support of Grace Lutheran Church!
Council Notes

The ELCA is split up into 65 synods which vary greatly in size, geography, membership and staffing. Synods unite the work of the individual congregations within their area and serve as regional support for the church staff. The result is a community of faith leaders, resources, networks, diverse perspectives and ideas, all doing God’s work in the world around us.

Grace Lutheran Church is part of the Sierra Pacific Synod, a community of nearly 200 congregations across central and northern California and northern Nevada. The geographical expanse of the synod is large, and the churches vary widely from inner-city San Francisco to Spanish language ministries for farm workers in Lodi. Each year, there is an annual Synod Assembly, where the pastoral and lay leaders of the churches gather together for a few days to hear about the ministry of our broader synod communities and handle the business aspects of the organization.

The 33rd Annual Sierra Pacific Synod Assembly is approaching on May 6-8 this year. The theme for this assembly is “STILL church TOGETHER, Called and Sent.” Last year's Assembly was postponed by a year due to the pandemic. This year’s Synod Assembly is unlike any previous one as it will be completely online. And it’s an important Assembly, as it includes the prayerful election of a new Synod Bishop. Bishop Mark Holmerud ended his second term as the Sierra Pacific Synod Bishop last year after serving in the role since 2008 -- he remained in position this past year until a new bishop could be elected.

Electing a bishop is a big deal, as we work to discern whom God is calling to leadership at this time and this place. There is a whole process around it, including an ecclesiastical ballot (but without the smoke, I’m told). The process started in the Fall of 2019 when names of potential nominees started to be submitted to the synod office. This process allows voting members to learn more about the nominees ahead of the Synod Assembly, enabling some preparation while also being open to how the Spirit may move us in the ecclesiastical ballot.

Grace will have six voting members at the assembly this year – our two pastoral staff along with four lay leaders (myself, Erik Rausch, Bruce FitzGerald, and Marilyn Aden). Please keep us and the Synod leaders in your prayers as we approach the dates for the Synod Assembly. If you're interested in learning more about the Synod Assembly or the potential bishop nominees, check out the Sierra Pacific Synod website at spselca.org.

Holly Lucke
Grace Council President

2021 Legacy Grant Awards

The Endowment Committee is very pleased to announce that the Church Council approved six Legacy Grant Awards this year totaling $13,500. The first two internal awards are for one off needs of the Church that were outside of the regular operating budget. The four external grant awards are for Grace member sponsored non-profits that either support our local community or have ELCA support nationally or internationally.

The awards are as follows:
1. $1000 – for a dedicated computer to support Grace’s live streaming worship services and recordings.
2. $1000 – for a new bench for the grand piano in the sanctuary to replace the existing bench that is failing.
3. $3000 – to Farming Hope of SF to support their farm to table training for the homeless
4. $5000 to Bright Stars of Bethlehem to support their film school
5. $1000 to South Palo Alto Food Closet
6. $2500 to Gardner Health Services in San Jose to support medical services provided to the homeless in our local community

We are most blessed for this opportunity to serve Grace and our community.
Sunday Worship
9:30 am Livestream
10:45 am In-Person
gracepa.org

Also broadcast on Cable 30
Sundays: 11 am | 8:30 pm
Mondays: 12:30 pm

And available on the Grace YouTube channel:
links at gracepa.org

Easter Worship Schedule
9:30 a.m. Livestream from the Sanctuary (gracepa.org)
10:45 a.m. Outdoor In-Person (Courtyard)
April 4, 2022