

The Reverend's Ruminations - April 2021

On a recent Zoom meeting with the Fairmont Area Ministerial Association, talk turned to Holy Week and Easter plans, as well as the subject of recently-loosened COVID restrictions for churches. I'll go ahead and summarize: practices and policies do vary a fair amount in the community, but among our sister mainline Protestant congregations, mask use and social distancing are still very much observed. I have not fielded any questions or complaints regarding dropping such measures, and I think that is mostly because we have taken a fairly careful approach to in-person worship services for several months already. The average age of our membership makes this a particularly wise decision, and I thank you for being mindful of one another's health and safety. We've been able to worship together in a hybrid format for seven months while avoiding being a source of infection in our community. Keep up the good work, and get your vaccination when it's available to you!

I presume I'm not the only one, however, who has heard commentary from friends or even casual acquaintances about how "their church" or "the _____ church in _____" has been meeting "normally" for months—or even throughout the pandemic. Just yesterday I again heard, "we/they don't require masks, and have been singing and having communion the whole time." All I can do in those moments is shake my head and pray that the person relating the information is not currently carrying the virus. On the other end of the spectrum, St. Martin's Episcopal Church (just two blocks away from us) was only authorized by their diocese to resume limited in-person indoor worship beginning last week (March 21)! Amid those extremes, I feel comfortable saying that our existing protocols will remain in effect for the foreseeable future. Council and Board meetings are small enough groups that each has made choices about virtual or in-person options based on the comfort and health situation of their members, and I encourage that to continue as well.

On a different note, I recently received word that I am to attend the Air Force's Basic Chaplain Course at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama, from April 25 – May 21. *Yes, I was already a fully-qualified and experienced Army Chaplain, but this is a non-negotiable requirement of my transfer.* 😊 To limit the impact on my ministry here at First Congregational, I had hoped to be scheduled for a summer iteration of the course—although only half-heartedly, considering it's Alabama in the summer!?! But with all the pandemic restrictions that even the military has had to work under during the past year, slots were extremely limited, and this is the one I got. My absence does mean that confirmation classes will end a little earlier than planned, but Confirmation Sunday will take place immediately after I return on May 23. Worship services here will of course continue with pulpit supply and some very capable volunteers from our church family, so I pray that you'll make them welcome and even lend a hand where you can!

In the six Sundays between Easter and Pentecost (May 23), all the epistle readings prescribed by the Revised Common Lectionary are from the First Letter of John—not to be confused with the Gospel of John. The author of 1 John (as well as 2 & 3 John) is unknown, but scholars believe the writer probably belonged to the same community to which the Gospel of John was written. In the opening chapter, we hear this affirmation about the church community:

"This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1John 1:5-10, NRSV).

In light of this understanding about our walk of faith and our role as members of Christ's family, I invite you to read the included reflection, "Church is Hard." May it challenge and comfort you in the weeks ahead!

Yours in Christ's service,

Rev. Cory Germain