

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

June 13, 2021, The 3rd Sunday of Pentecost/10th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Psalm 20:1-8, II Corinthians 5:6-10, 14-17

The Easter Good News in our 65th Week!

Once upon a time, in a land far, far away,
in a place and time that feel like they are in a different universe,
the Session of First Presbyterian Church met in the Sunday School room by the elevator on March 15, 2020. We gathered in that room because the rest of you were out in the Library, having unbeknownst to you, your last Sunday doughnuts for a very long time!

We gathered to make the difficult decision about whether or not we should close the church for a couple weeks to see what would happen with the Coronavirus.

We voted to close for two weeks. It was a really hard decision to make because nothing had prepared any of us to make a decision like that. The only other time we've closed was because of snow, and we knew what to do with a big snow storm.

But the following Friday the world outside our church shut down and your Session began to meet in a strange new land called Zoom. We learned together how to mute and unmute, and say to each other: "you're muted!"

Not knowing what the year ahead of us would hold, and sad that we had missed Easter morning together, something that had never happened in the history of this church family, the Session decided that our first service together in-person we would celebrate Easter.

We assumed when we made that decision that sometime in the summer of 2020 life would go back to normal. And then we missed Easter 2021 too.

So, it is with joy, after 64 Sundays of worshipping together, while apart, that we gather this morning to celebrate the powerful good news that Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen Indeed!

In II Corinthians (5:7) Paul say that we walk by faith, not by sight. And it's felt like that hasn't it? Mid-pandemic I heard a woman from the corporate world being interviewed on NPR, and she said that living and working in the pandemic felt like flying in an airplane at 30,000 feet while trying to build the airplane.

Over and over again many of us have felt like we were reinventing the wheel, or trying to stay airborne while building the plane.

In the midst of the chaos, the losses, the changes, the joys and the sorrows,
the promise of our Christian faith, the promise of Easter morning kept offering us the deepest truth of this season of pandemic.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God, in Christ Jesus our Lord, who lived and died and rose to new life for us.

Absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of god in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Even when we couldn't see what the next day would bring, the promised love of our God was constant.

We have lived this verse from II Corinthians 5:7; we walked by faith, not by sight through much of this time.

We are people changed by what these last 15 months have held. In our church, in our families, in our schools, in our groups of friends, we have lived in new and strange ways: we have found new ways to communicate, new ways to educate, new ways to worship together.

Some of us, from our youngest to our oldest, have spent more time in front of a computer than they ever have before.

Admittedly, some of the changes have been good, we've learned in deep and profound ways how important the people in our lives are to us. Being separated from children, grandchildren, friends, and the church family showed us what those people really meant to us.

But many of us have learned that the hard way, as our church and our families lost loved ones who died while we were separated from them.

Even in our deep sorrow we walked by faith and not by sight.

It was never easy, AND we were never alone.

Some of the changes have stretched us in other ways, as many of us have learned, and become more proficient in, new technologies. We have a new team of 8 people joining Charles and Jason in running our new camera, sound and recording system. For those of you watching us on YouTube, I ask you to please be patient with them as they learn this new skill of juggling many details to create a recording of our Sunday mornings together.

The real question is, 15 months ago had you ever watched *anything* on YouTube?

I'm guessing the answer to that question will have a lot to do with your age, or your enjoyment of computers ;)!

Over the past year, over half of you have shown up at one time or another, many of you weekly, at the Sunday Gathering by Zoom. Those have been wonderful times when together we've shared stories from our lives, answered questions that helped us tell those stories, did show and tell with treasures, met each other's pets, shared in the Lord's Supper in real time, and got to share our Joys and Concerns in real time, and pray for each other week by week. Which as your pastor was such a relief to be able to pray with you in person. We've gathered with Jim & Linda from Arizona, another Jim in Long Island, and another Jim in Quincy. Zoom gatherings have been a gift.

It's hard to remember a time without Zoom, and yet just this week I renewed our Zoom contract as we came to the end of our first year of using it.

Personally, this year I learned something that seminary definitely didn't prepare me for: I learned to preach to empty pews and use my imagination to see you all here, so that you felt like we were connecting in this strange new world.

I must say, on this Easter morning, that I greatly prefer seeing you in person.

As your pastor one of my deepest heartaches and sorrows of this year was not being able to be with you in person in the midst of the joys and sorrows of your lives.

We have been through a lot individually, in our families, and together as a family of faith. I believe it will take us a long time to understand all the ways that this season has affected us.

And I believe that our faith, more than our sight, will continue to guide us to live as Easter people who trust and believe that the cross and the grave stand empty for all eternity. Christ has conquered sin and death, and risen to new life for you, and for me, for those we love, and for the world.

This 65th Sunday is a celebration of Easter joy: Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen Indeed!

Please join me in this response:

Christ is Risen! **People: Christ is Risen Indeed!**

Christ is Risen! **People: Christ is Risen Indeed!**

Christ is Risen! **People: Christ is Risen Indeed!**

There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Alleluia! Amen!