OCTOBER WORSHIP

A new sermon series will begin in October entitled PRESS ON: WALKING IN JESUS’ WAY.
As we press on through the ongoing pandemic, we will take this moment in time to refocus ourselves on Jesus’ path. Even when the way feels uncertain, Jesus’ presence offers markers along the path to guide our steps - and our hearts - toward God. Each Sunday we’ll take a closer look at one of those markers.

OTHER SPECIAL WORSHIP MOMENTS:

October 4 - World Communion Sunday - our monthly outdoor service of Holy Communion at 11:30 a.m.
Advance signup is requested. You may signup via E-Notes or by calling the church office.

October 4 at 2:00 p.m. Service of Confirmation
Grace will celebrate four young adults who come to be confirmed in the Christian faith.
This will be an outdoor service and also available for watching remotely. Please surround our confirmands with your prayers and well wishes:
Riley Schmidt
Cianna Ferrante
Connor Franklin
John Madsen

Each Friday the Grace community also gathers for prayer at 12 noon led by Grace member, Mark Gruber-Lebowitz. All are welcome to join. Zoom meeting ID: 824 9086 2881; Password: 12345

DISCIPLESHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Racial Justice Conversations: Tuesday, October 6 and October 20 at 7:30 p.m.
During the summer a group of Grace Church members gathered over six sessions to delve into issues of racism and white privilege, using the book White Fragility as a launching point for larger discussions about racial awareness and acting in ways that interrupt and dismantle racism. The work of dismantling racism is a continuous one and in that spirit two followup discussions are planned for the first and third Thursdays of October.
Resources for these sessions include James Baldwin’s The Fire Next Time, How to Be An Anti-Racist by Ibram Kendi, and “Hope Born Out of History: Telling the Whole History,” a video resource about racial justice in our own Baltimore-Washington Conference. The group meets via Zoom. If you would like to register to attend, please contact Rev. Amy McCullough.

“The Content of Our Character” class - November 11 and 18
Then, in November, Grace’s Theologian-in-Residence, Dr. Arthur Sutherland, will lead a two-part class entitled “The Content of Our Character” on November 11 and 18 in the evenings. This class builds on Dr. Martin Luther King’s phrase in his “I Have a Dream” speech by examining the concept of character in the Bible (particularly in Galatians) and raises the question of why character matters now. It will also be an online Zoom class and more information will be forthcoming. Registration will take place at the end of October.
PRAYER STATIONS

During this long season of the pandemic, when we cannot gather as we typically would in our sanctuary, the Grace Trustees and Worship Team have combined efforts to create spaces of prayer in the outdoor areas of our property. Recently a series of prayer stations have been added to our front lawn which include movement prayers to acknowledge the loneliness, anxiety and needs of this season, prayer stones to offer you encouragement through faith in God, and a prayer tree where you may add your own prayer concerns. A final station is underway with the installation of a labyrinth on the side yard in coming weeks. The stations are open daily, roughly from dawn until dusk.

Stop by!

Sanctuary open for Prayer
Monday, Wednesday, Friday
8:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.
You are invited to visit the sanctuary for a time of prayer and peace. Use the glass door entryway (ring on keypad to enter) and exit via the Family Room door.
Please wear a mask and use the front chancel area to help define the space for cleaning purposes. Organ rehearsal or sanctuary work may be going on when you arrive, but you are welcome to enter and use the space as your needs guide you.

NEW FUN ZONE

In addition to the prayer stations on the front lawn, Grace has added a FUN ZONE on our upper parking lot, which includes a painted basketball court, a “trike trail,” a four-square court and other games. These activities provide a welcome outdoor play space for families of our neighborhood and church community. A huge thank you to Burt English who designed the Fun Zone, and to the volunteers who helped paint. Please note that one result of the new Fun Zone is that the upper parking lot may be blocked off at certain times which can impact access to the Grace parking lot from Taplow Road.
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 29 Via Zoom
This is an annual meeting in which we celebrate the ministries of Grace Church and conduct important business for the year ahead.
ZOOM Meeting ID: 824 9086 2881; Password: 12345

BLACK LIVES MATTER

On an overcast Saturday morning, August 29, from 10 to 11 a.m., an estimated 150 members of area congregations gathered for a rally on the four corners of the intersection of North Charles Street and Northern Parkway. While most of the demonstrators were white, it was a diverse gathering of individuals. What was very noticeable was the number of younger persons attending.

For more than an hour individuals stood with many different signs supporting racial justice and waving to passing cars that slowed down with many honking their horns in support. Two signs seemed to speak to many of the persons attending: “White Silence equals Violence” and “If Not Now, When?” Several attending acknowledged the Grace banner “ACT TO END RACISM” hanging on the front portico wall.

While Grace served as a host location offering parking and refreshments, some of the other congregations represented were Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, Church of the Redeemer, Bolton Street Synagogue, Ascension Lutheran, Faith Presbyterian and First & St. Stephen’s UCC. Our own District Superintendent, the Rev. Dr. Wanda Duckett was also in attendance.

On Sunday, August 30, Pastor Dane, Rev. Amy, Suzannah and Luke McCullough, Kelly Jackson and George Kim gathered after worship to collate 40 kits of school supplies for students beginning the academic year at Roland Park Elementary/Middle School.
Thank you to those who donated school supplies and financial support to this annual outreach project which equips students with needed materials as they begin another school year.

Your financial support ensures the ongoing work of Grace Church. Thank you for keeping your pledge current.
Sermon preached by Pastor Dane Wood  
August 30, 2020  
Romans 8:26-39

“It will happen again and again that the person who is charged with offering the prayer for the fellowship will not feel at all in the spiritual mood to do so, and will much prefer to turn over their task to another for this day. Such a shift is not advisable, however. Otherwise, the prayer of the fellowship will too easily be governed by moods which have nothing to do with spiritual life. It is precisely when a person, who is borne down by inner emptiness and weariness or a sense of personal unworthiness, feels that they would like to withdraw from their task, that they should learn what it means to have a duty to perform in the fellowship, and the body should support them in their weakness, in their inability to pray. Perhaps it is right here that one will realize the profound truth of Paul’s words [from Romans 8:26]: ‘We know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.’ Everything depends on the fellowship’s understanding and supporting and praying the person’s prayer with them as its prayer.”

As you may suspect if you’ve been following our series… these are the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer from his work Life Together, speaking on the importance of praying together and on how prayer builds up not just the body as a whole, but individuals within, notably here, its leader or pastor. I bring this reading before us today for 2 reasons, the first being that we will be discussing Prayer as part of the Faith Communities life today, and 2nd, I frankly don’t feel like praying and preaching at all today, and good ole’ Bonhoeffer is pretty much burning my ears up with this quote.

Why don’t I feel like praying or preaching this week? I don’t know… if I knew, I’d have fixed it by now. I can guess it’s a number of things… the idea of my cancer coming back, even if all the signs are good… the looming threat of COVID-19 everywhere outside my door… the waning endurance required to survive such physical and social isolation… just plain good ole fashioned stress… and that constant inner dialogue that says I’m never doing enough… that’s just a handful of things off the top of my head. I’m guessing we all have our own burdens right now and I doubt I’m the only one who feels like just not working or doing anything. Maybe it’s textbook depression and mental health issues, maybe it’s spiritual hibernation or just physical tiredness.

Now, I’m getting into all this for a reason, and that’s not to garner some kind of support for me personally (though that is always welcome, obviously). I’m hoping that my reflection will serve as an illustration for what you and others are also feeling. And to highlight the need we all have, be you pastor or congregant, be you young in the faith or mature, to be held up by our community of fellow believers. And the practice we use to hold each other up is prayer.

Our friend Bonhoeffer would break prayer into two parts, each one feeding the other. Prayer done with others and Prayer done alone.

How shall we pray alone and why? “Pray on the basis of a word of Scripture. In this way we shall not become the victims of our own emptiness. Prayer means nothing else but the readiness and willingness to receive and appropriate the Word, and, what is more, to accept it in one’s personal situation, particular tasks, decisions, sins, and temptations. […] According to a word of Scripture we pray for the clarification of our day, for preservation from sin, for growth in sanctification, for faithfulness and strength in our work. And we may be certain that our prayer will be heard, because it is a response to God’s Word and promise.”

Bonhoeffer very wisely suggests that when we pray alone, we use scripture as our guide. We do that so that our own mood, our own faults, our own emptiness as he calls it, don’t get in the way. It’s a barrier I’m all too familiar with. I have studied and continue to study the Scriptures, I KNOW about God but that doesn’t mean I always feel the connection. There are so many things in life that separate, distance, and alienate us… we hit a barricade as Professor Heather Murray Elkins of Drew University would describe, “We cannot cross [this barrier], of our own will, all that divides us from those we love or love us, and this includes God. We are stopped at the barricade of suffering or sin and fall silent. There are no words [of our own] for the crossing.”

Thus we should trust in the WORD of God by praying with the WORD of God. That means praying using literal words from the Bible, but it also means praying in the spirit of the Living Word, who is Jesus Christ. And this is made possible by the Holy Spirit, that helper sent to us and among us. “The Spirit helps us in our weakness.” Paul reminds us. That means prayers can be recitations of scripture, they can be guided by scripture, they can be free prayer that is aimed to be with Christ. But it must be practiced and even “the poorest mumbling utterance [in earnest faith in Christ] can be better than the best-formulated prayer.” (Bonhoeffer)

So, in my weakness, my reluctance to even be doing this right now, in the emptiness I feel in the moment, in the recognition of my own unworthiness alone but having been made worthy in Christ, I’ll pray alone.

“Holy Spirit… help me in my weakness, for I do not know what to do or say. Take my sighs of pain and intercede, making them your words that are beyond my own imagination. Search my heart, O God, know me and know my will, make it your will. Take me and work all things I do for good, not for myself but for all you have called and died
for. You have, through Jesus Christ, chosen all persons, even me, to be your children in a large family. Thank you Almighty God, for you have called me and justified me in your glory. Amen.”

It’s a bit odd to be praying in the middle of a sermon for help with said sermon and prayer…but life and death, height and depth are nothing for God, a little time, past; present; or future, will not hold back that power either.

The prayer alone is vital for us who are Christians. It is the main line of communication between our own spiritual self and God. Relationships require communication…Are you communicating with God? How are you going to trust, have faith in Jesus Christ, if you are not talking? I’ll freely admit, I need to talk to God more. But there is another part of prayer we must practice, the prayers we do together.

So much of our last few weeks has been building up to this, as we reflected on the nature of who we are to God, and each other, in the community of faith. That we are believers, sinners forgiven, guided by the word and suffering in Christ together…through all of that, we are enabled to be connected by the power of the Holy Spirit. So we must take our prayers and connect them, directing some prayers alone to others and then praying together for the whole.

In the church, we call these prayers for others intercessions. You might be most familiar with it as “The Prayers of the People” which we do every week after the sermon and responsive hymn. This regular communal prayer serves as a service we do together for each other and the world. It is not the least thing we do in worship; it’s perhaps the most. Bonhoeffer would explain it as follows: “A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another, or it collapses. I can no longer condemn or hate a person for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble they cause me. Their face, that hitherto may have been strange and intolerable to me, is transformed in intercession into the countenance of a person for whom Christ died, the face of a forgiven sinner. […] Intercessory prayer is the purifying bath into which the individual and the fellowship must enter every day. The struggle we undergo with our family in intercession may be a hard one, but that struggle has the promise that it will gain its goal.”

We pray for each other, our friends and enemies, because that is the tie that binds us. God bound us together in creation as those made in God’s image, Christ binds us in his blood washing our sins, and the Holy Spirit binds us as one body through prayer. It is the prayer alone that builds the body and it is the prayer together that builds the individual. I cannot be the pastor, I cannot be a believer, if I am not talking to God, communicating and interceding for others, you, the church I am called to look after… and the church cannot be the Body of Christ unless it is in turn building up its members and leaders. I am able to preach only because you pray for me and God acts on those prayers. You are able to go and work, to care for your family, to do more miracles than we can imagine because the church prays for you. And the church exists because you are praying for it.

All this is possible because of God’s grace and love. “If God is for us, who is against us?” Paul comes to the climax of perhaps the entire New Testament in these verses. It’s a love song and this is the great declaration of undying love for us.

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Nothing you do will separate God from you…you might not be praying and talking to God right now, but God did not leave, did not go away or stop trying to talk to you. God has not stopped talking to us the Church, the community is not separated from God’s love just because we can’t be in the building. Whatever the funk I’m in at this present time that’s got me hung up, does not remove me from God’s love, it does not leave. And our prayers, alone and together, push me back, hold me up, and keep me doing my duty because it reassures me of the promise that God is there. I’m praying for you in this time, that no matter the barrier that is blocking you from living fully, you will feel the support of your community, your church, your family in Christ…we are praying for you, the Holy Spirit is moving and will deliver you across all barriers in your life just as surely as it has delivered me to the end of this sermon.

Amen.
Happy Birthday greetings to those of our Grace family celebrating in October:

2 Becky Shaner, Asa Shaw
3 Kent Grasso, Elisabeth Nix, Nancy Webb
4 Zachary Graf
5 Lynn Beachler, Joseph Dandy
6 Darrell Sacks, Elizabeth Shaner
9 Allison Ferguson, Michael Gullett
10 Deb Bidlack, William Fishman, David Garman
11 Claire Greenhouse
12 David Beachler, Jamison Hodges, Charles Plitt III, Susannah L. Sowells
13 Olivia Birkel, Stephen Danz, Buzz Getschel, Josephine Gravestrong, Barbara Starkey
14 Luke McCullough
15 Jeb Cook
16 Donald A’Hern, Sue Houghton
17 Jeanette Cosper, Suzanne Stevens
20 John Gillan, Chloe Kick, Mandy Martin, Glenn Simmons, Ron Spedalere
21 Barbara Blair, Matias Calderon
22 Matthew Franklin, Jean Smith
23 John Madsen, Erin Millon
25 Carla Hackley
27 Anders Schillinger
28 John Crow, Mike McGuire, Lily Updike
29 Becca Friedel
30 Brandon Bickham, Susan Rice, Beth Vargas
31 James Adams, Susie Guth, B. A. Sewell

Join the choir - virtually
All are welcome to join the Chancel Choir on Thursday evenings for two special events each month:
1 - a sight-singing reading class
2 - a sing-along session
It will be safe and fun!

Please register with Chris Schroeder at chris@graceunitedmethodist.org and he will send you the Zoom link prior to the Thursday evening session.
1st Thursday of each month: 7:30-8 p.m. Sight-reading
3rd Thursday of each month: 7:30-8 p.m. Sing-along of a hymn/choral work carol

FOR OCTOBER
(donors will be billed only if flowers are used)

The flowers are given to the Glory of God and...
October 4: in living memory of Iona & Raymond Shepherd by their daughter and son-in-law, Debby & Steve Jencks and granddaughters Sarah & Melissa; and in honor of Lynn Beachler by Diane & Don Topper and David & Annette Beachler
October 11: in loving memory of Eleanor Key Lynn on her birthday by sons Tom & Jim, and in loving memory of Sara & A. H. Nichols by their daughter Sara and grandchildren Celia, Susannah and Drew
October 18: in loving memory of Elmer Wingate on his birthday by his wife Jeaneen, and in loving memory of her brother F. Carvel Payne on his birthday by Claire Greenhouse
October 25: in honor of Beth Vargas on her birthday by her parents Janet & Paul Ander, and in memory of Elizabeth Stroh Payne on her birthday by Claire & Walter Greenhouse.

ALTAR FLOWER SPONSORS for November and December

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Urns: Thom Rinker Dr. Nancy Blackstone
Poinsettias in Organ Bays George Kahl
COVID-19 fatigue may have a blessing

Seven months of isolation, separation, uncertainty, worry, illness casting clouds upon almost every dimension of life with no predictable end in sight.

Our church life is especially impacted. We miss being with each other in communal worship in the sanctuary, sharing the peace (and a hug) with pew mates, being inspired by the music of our choirs and congregational singing, and supported by others in our prayer and praise to God. Once the building had to close, it didn’t take long for necessity to become the mother of invention and creativity and weekly virtual worship services found their way to our website, Facebook, YouTube, to all those with a screen to view.

A Grace member asked if there were a competition somewhere for the best virtual worship where Grace could enter its weekly production. While we still miss all of the benefits of in-house worship, I have found several personal blessings in watching online. I so love the variety of backgrounds – the courtyard columbarium prayer garden with hydrangeas in bloom, Amy preaching from Tamsyn’s bench, outdoor scenes showing the beautiful grounds, interior shots highlighting the architectural and sculptural details, each intentionally designed in 1951 with religious significance. The seasonal banners, paraments, baptismal font, lectern and pulpit, the flexibility of our organ positioning – these are captured by the camera, enhancing the worship experience and appreciation of our setting.

I feel as if the pastor preaching that morning is speaking directly to me, face to face, each word easily understood. It is nice to see and listen to the liturgists “up close and personal,” some from their own abodes. What a joy to see in their eyes and voices each of our soloists singing directly to me – such a different view than from my usual pew. What a treat to watch Chris’s two hands and two feet mastering the five manuals of our majestic organ in his music making. Being able to watch the service at 10 a.m. or at our leisure is another plus.

I also received a phone call from a former Grace member living in Florida who watches several church services online each week who was quite complimentary about Grace’s online production.

Sincere appreciation to the worship planning team and the technological assistants who seamlessly plan and blend the various recorded elements in to a most meaningful service each week. “Whenever two or three are gathered in my name…” We may be physically apart but in some ways even closer.

If there is a competition somewhere, Grace’s expertly crafted virtual services would certainly take a prize.

BOOK CLUB SELECTION FOR OCTOBER 12th - The Long Call by Ann Cleves - JOIN US!