

St. Paul's Herald

August 2025

LETTER FROM PASTOR

“What’s the hardest part of vacation?” That may sound like a trick question, but it’s actually not. The hardest part of vacation is ‘coming back’ when it is over. Having just returned from vacation to the Thousand Islands area of New York with my family, this is all too fresh in my mind. Don’t get me wrong, I love my job and am blest to be here at St. Paul’s, but coming back to the regular day-to-day life after ‘time away from it all’, as the saying goes, can be a bit of a challenge. We all like times of rest, relaxation, getting away from the regular grind of daily life. The problem is we cannot simply live life on ‘vacation’ all the time and be away from our regular responsibilities. At some point, we have to ‘come back’ to our regular daily life and the tasks God has given us to complete. Whether it is being an employee, a spouse, a parent, a neighbor, or countless others -- each are tasks, or *vocations* (as Martin Luther the reformer calls them), in which God has placed us. These are regular tasks of our lives that we sometimes get a break from, but to which we will always need to ‘come back’. No matter how much we enjoyed a vacation or time away, the reality is we all must ‘come back’ to our regular *vocations*. The author of Ecclesiastes says, “there is a season, and time for every matter under heaven” (Eccl. 3:1) which includes ‘coming back’ to what God has tasked each of us with. We don’t have to fret about returning to our routine tasks because God is with us and has given us these responsibilities as a gift to use in service toward others (see Eccl. 3:12-13 & 1 Peter 4:10).

The problem with ‘coming back’ after time away is that it is easy to fall into that trap of thinking such regular tasks are not something to be enjoyed. This however is not the case. Whether it’s a husband taking out the garbage, a teacher preparing her lessons, or a child finishing their chores and schoolwork, God wants each to find joy in the regular events of their daily lives. God does not want us to see the tasks of our *vocation(s)* as burdens, but as opportunities to glorify Him and serve others. I don’t take out the garbage because I enjoy garbage, but I can find joy in serving my family and respecting my neighbors. Changing a dirty diaper is not something I love, but I do love my son and find joy in helping him grow as a Child of God. Joy can be found in our regular tasks not because we like every person we come across or find every task pleasurable, but because we are serving others. The joy comes from seeing whatever you have been given to do as a gift from God to bring glory to Christ Jesus for His redemption.


There will be a time when you have to ‘come back’ to your daily *vocation(s)* after being away. No matter when that happens or what you are ‘coming back’ from, see that time as a fresh opportunity to praise God for His gifts to you and renew your commitment to serving others to bring honor to Him. In whatever you do, “do [it] all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31) and in service toward others. Blessing as you do so, fellow brothers and sisters in Christ!

In Christ,

Pastor Josh

CONNECTING TO GRACE

The Reformer Martin Luther once wrote “music is one of the fairest and most glorious gifts of God”. Luther certainly loved music, as have so many people throughout history. Music has a way of connecting and expressing life’s realities in ways that few other things can. For this reason, even in the Early church, music was, in varying forms, part of worship. It was one of the ways in which people came to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and the saving grace that comes through Him alone. In fact, later on in the Middle Ages, music was one of the primary ways in which people learned the Christian faith. Even today, music remains an important part of Christian worship in countless church bodies across the globe. Sacred music (music which is religious in nature) continues to be a way in which people learn of the grace of Jesus Christ.



*Praise the Lord!
For it is good to sing praises
to our God; for it is pleasant,
and a song of praise is fitting.*

Psalm 147:1

Connecting people to the Endless circles of God’s Grace is our mission here at St. Paul’s. One important way we can do this is through music at church and in our own daily lives. In the time of the Early church, in the book of Acts, we are told how even when Paul and Silas were sitting in prison, they were singing hymns to God (see Acts 16:16-25). Even in the chains of prison, Paul and Silas sought to praise God for all He had done through Jesus and give thanks for the grace they had received through Him. We do the same still today here at St. Paul’s with our hymns, songs, and liturgical music during worship as well as with our recent Thanks and Praise hymn Sing night. The music was chosen to remind us of who God is and of the realities of His grace.

You probably have realized at this point that not all songs are created equal. Even within the category of sacred music, some hymns and songs connect to God’s grace in better ways than others. If such music is for us to know Christ and the realities of His grace for us, it must point directly to Jesus. Sometimes, a hymn or song may sound nice, have a catchy tune, or make you feel good, but it does not point to Jesus. For example, the song Pass It On, touches on the idea of passing God’s love on to other people, which of course is not a bad thing. The problem is that the song says little about who God is, and His grace toward us. It’s hard to connect to God and His grace through a song that says very little about God (or Christ for that matter). I am not saying the song is bad, or that you can’t like it. The point is why not use songs, hymns, and liturgical music that give impressive word pictures of who God is and the grace that He so freely bestows through Jesus Christ. Good sacred music is always focused on Christ!

While each person has their own preferences when it comes to music, there has always been a greater purpose for music within Christianity – teaching the faith, praising God for who He is, and thanking Him for the grace He gives through Christ Jesus. Using sacred music in worship and in your own life allows all this to take place. While music will continue to be used in worship regularly, why not use it in your own personal life as well? “What if I am not a singer or have no musical talent?”, you ask. That’s okay! Jesus still wants you connected to the grace He gives. Psalm 100:1 says, “make a joyful noise to the LORD”. Notice that it doesn’t say sing in key or be musically talented. Instead, it’s all about knowing and praising God for who He is and what He has done for you in Jesus. In fact, you don’t even have to sing the words when you use sacred music to personally reflect on God’s grace. Simply find a recording of a song or hymn and listen to it. Use a song or a hymn as a prayer. Pick a song or hymn, read its words, and then reflect on what it reveals about God’s grace. Make use of Christ-centered music as a regular connection to the realities of God’s grace. Stay connected to grace through the beautiful gift of music!