

Dear Church,

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. These are the words I use to greet you whenever we worship together, and these days I mean them more than ever. I am sending you *grace, love, and communion*.

As we have heard countless times in the last few months we are living through “unprecedented times.” At the outset of the year, probably none of us could have foreseen what 2020 would look like. I remember those early days of January when I thought the biggest news story of the year would be the bush fires raging in Australia...that seems like a long time ago now. That was before quarantine, before drive through COVID testing, before the suspension of in person school and the postponement of the summer Olympics. That was before Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd were senselessly and unjustly killed and streets in our cities were occupied by both peaceful demonstrations and violent agitators. So much has happened in just a matter of months, and if you are anything like me, you might be wondering where we left the receipt for 2020, so we can return or exchange it for a new year.

Times like these are often revealing. We find out more about the social structures and conditioning that has shaped our culture. We see the fissures in the systems we rely on. But, in difficult times, we also find out who we are. We see our true character emerge and we discover what we really believe in. We find out where we put our faith.

So my friends, it is with both faith and frustration that we face the days ahead, and attempt to do our level best. And this is the very reason I send you *grace, love, and communion*, because in the church, these virtues are our starting place. It is the goodness, the fellowship, the encouragement that we find in our relationship with God and with this beloved community that are our foundation. When we begin with grace, love, mercy, peace and justice, I am confident that our most spacious imagination, and our most faithful behavior will follow. I wish these upon your lives, and our life together as a congregation.

Grace and peace to you, to our church, and to our world.

-Pastor Emily