



## *A Message from Rev. Tom Ficklin*

The question often asked lately appears to be, “When are we going to do face-to-face, in-person worship?” The short answer is, “We just do not know.” The long answer is, “It’s complicated.”

We see spikes in colleges as they head back to classes. We see spikes in communities who are not faithful in wearing masks and distancing. We would hate to see someone, or someone’s, become sick because they came to church, even though it would be next to impossible to really know where someone actually got sick. But why take the chance?

YET, we yearn for the days when we can sit together and worship and laugh and cry and hug and do all the things that humans have done for many, many years. We miss the love and emotional health of our church community. We feel incomplete without the interaction others provide.

So we wait, yet, how do we wait?

We appear to be waiting much better than other church communities are. There are church communities that are at odds about when to go back to church. Some (not in our church) are adamant that it is time to go back and are ready to leave the church if they do not get their way. Some (not in our church) are adamant that it is NOT time to go back and are ready to leave the church if they do not get their way.

I have found a level of respect in our church community that is healthy. We are disappointed we cannot go back; disappointed not with other people, but with the circumstances that prevent us from going back. We are not backbiting or demanding or raising voices; we are having healthy, open conversations, in love and respect.

What does Paul say, “*Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*”

I really wonder if we have not already made the most important decision, that being **how** we will interact with each other during this unprecedented

pandemic. We have chosen to interact with LOVE. As we have chosen this path of love, when we actually come back in face-to-face, in-person worship may matter less. We have chosen to interact with LOVE. Again, I hear Paul saying, ***“If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”***

Candidly, there are pastors all over who are dealing with congregations at odds with one another and I feel for them, but that is not my experience at the present. What we do is important, but how we do it is more *importanter*, if my English majors will allow that statement.

The process of how we “be” church is important. We must do the right thing, the right way, at the right time, every day, and all day. Even when doing the right thing is hard or frustrating, like deciding when to come back to church face-to-face, in-person.

I thank God for each of you and all of you. I thank God for your loving spirit. I thank God for your faith and the way you live your faith in service. I thank God for the way you are doing the business of church in loving and kind conversations. As bad as the pandemic is, these churches are still a good place to be. God tells me that He loves each of you unconditionally. I hope you hear Him say that often to you. I hope you also tell others of His love.

