

## Message from Robin+

*Grace to you and peace. We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*  
*1 Thessalonians 1:1b-3*

These are likely the oldest words in the New Testament, written by the Apostle Paul to one of the earliest Christian communities. The first letter to the Thessalonians is believed to be the earliest writing, even earlier than the Gospels. And what beautiful words they are, clearly revealing the love shared in this faith community founded by Paul and encouraged later in his letter to them. In these two sentences we can tell so much about these Christians.

They lived in an atmosphere of grace and peace, they gave thanks for one another, they prayed for one another, and they took time to remember the work of faith, and labor of love, and steadfastness of hope that they had in one another through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We might think these first century Christians lived an easy life based on all the grace and peace, thanks and prayers, love and faith expressed here. But the reality is that they were a minority group and that there was great cost in following Jesus. We might be tempted to say, “well, that was then, but we have a much worse situation in our lives right now.” But we would be mistaken. Life is always a series of ups and downs, joys and challenges but as Christians we have faith that there is more to life than what we can see and experience here in the world.

Paul’s words are for us and can be a guide for us no matter what we are facing in life. Are we aware of the grace and peace that God has for us? Are we thankful for God’s gifts to us? Are we in prayer for one another? Are we persisting in our work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope? Where do we experience the presence of Christ? How are we making Christ known?

In this pandemic I have been more aware of God’s presence than ever. I have seen so much grace, peace, thankfulness, prayer, faith, hope, and love than ever, despite our inability to receive the body of Christ in the Eucharist. I have witnessed Christ’s presence in word and deed over and over among us in this place. I see the acts of kindness among you, I sense God’s presence with us in worship, in the Word, in the beautiful offerings of music, and in the prayers.

I share this with you as we plan to again celebrate Eucharist, beginning on November 1, All Saints’ Day. We have not shared communion since last March, on the second Sunday in Lent. We have missed and we long for the presence of Christ in Eucharist. But we have learned that Christ is also experienced in community, prayer, mission, and scripture.

When we return to our service of Holy Eucharist, there will be some differences that will ensure the safety of everyone. We will receive communion, not kneeling at the altar rail, but standing at the chancel steps, just as we have done during our Celtic Services. We will receive only the bread at this time, but know that this does not mean you are receiving only half of Jesus. All of Christ is present in both bread and wine and in receiving either one we are receiving the fullness of Christ. There is a fancy church word for this – concomitance - which is the Eucharistic doctrine that affirms the simultaneous presence of Christ's body and blood in each of the eucharistic elements. It contradicts a narrow identification of Christ's body with the bread and Christ's blood with the wine. The doctrine of concomitance upholds the truth that the fullness of communion is available by receiving either the consecrated bread or wine.

It will be such a good and joyful thing for us to again receive Christ in the Eucharist beginning on November 1, even as we continue to experience the presence of Christ in many ways!