

Gen. Presbyter Report to Yellowstone Presbytery Rev. Kathy Goodrich November 1, 2024

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely,^[a] and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of^[b] the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:1-2.

“I believe... in the Communion of Saints...” - Apostles Creed

As we meet on All Saints Day, I am reflecting on and freshly inspired by some of the saints. As we recently walked the ancient roads, visited locations and places in Greece and Western Turkey from the book of Acts, day after day, I experienced an indescribable communion with some of the great cloud of witnesses. It was in Philippi that Paul, Silas, Luke, Lydia, the slave girl, the Roman jailer, were transformed and gave their all for Jesus and Jesus mission, the Holy Spirit’s remarkable transformation in and through their community of such *unity in Christ* that it defied all sociological categories and norms. There the Gospel broke out through their lives in such power that it would be said of them over in Thessaloniki that “the [people] who have turned the world upside down have come here also.” (Acts 17: 6)

I was struck not only by their passion and love, but their courage and persistence in affliction. Beaten brutally, bloodied and in torturing stocks at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns! How can we nurture our spiritual lives in community with each other, in little groups, that God might work mightily in and through our lives in tough times?

The Holy Spirit has been stirring, pestering in my soul to ask, “Are we willing to allow the Holy Spirit to create that loving, radical, Christ-like community in our churches, presbytery... Now?

Are we, disparate, different and fallible individuals, willing to be so captured by the same Gospel that, united in Christ, the light and the love of Jesus radiate among and out from us?

Am I willing, might we be willing, to surrender to what the Holy Spirit may wish to do among us? So Jesus is seen in and among us?

- 1) Prayer ministry... The formation of a group in the presbytery whose focus will be discerning the Spirit’s leading and stirring up prayer in and for our presbytery and churches was one of the top priorities emerging from the leadership Cabinet/PMT retreat in September.
- 2) Spiritual training is required if we are *to run the race of faith with perseverance* (Heb 12). Please look for spiritual training and growth opportunities that the presbytery will be offering and suggesting, so that we sink our roots more deeply into Christ (Paul and Ephesians 3). Practicing the Way as apprentices of Jesus means we need to be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and do as he did (John Mark Comer’s *Practicing the Way*).
- 3) Seeing with the eyes of Jesus (*People Eyes*), Listening, reflecting as to how to love, serve, partner as we join Christ in his mission in our communities, state, world. (A process)
- 4) Exploring and experimenting with new ways of being Church, including, but not limited to fresh expressions and dinner church.

Like those early saints, I, too, was convicted, transformed, and compelled by their whole-hearted, sacrificial love for Jesus, His mission, and for *all* the people they interacted with, even their jailors and enemies. I don't ever want to be the same after my experiences with some of the great cloud of witnesses in places we visited including Berea, Corinth, Athens, Ephesus, Patmos, and others. It was the trip of a spiritual lifetime.

George and I look forward to sharing more with you of our transformative experiences and insights into the texts and stories of scripture, very pertinent to our contexts today. We hope this trip can bless and enrich everyone. Please be in touch with us that we might share with you and / or your congregation in some way.

I invite you to join me in curious listening and discovery to learn not only from the saints of Bible times and 2,000 of church history (endless adventure and inspiration) but also the living ones around the globe (house churches in Iran, in Zimbabwe, ...) or in our presbytery and in your church that you may be challenged and built up in your faith.

For all the saints...

And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,

steals on the ear the distant triumph song,

and hearts are brave again, and arms are strong.

Alleluia, alleluia!

Personal:

This fall we are celebrating the 40th anniversary of my ordination, and of George's 46th! The one who has called is faithful!

We are grateful for the true gift of grace God knew we needed on this extraordinary Study leave trip. We were not able to get away for several years between Covid, and the decline and deaths of our moms before and during our sabbatical, which was followed by 5 more family deaths.