

You never want to send or receive a letter in mid December like the one that was sent and received this week starting like this. We are currently facing a challenge as we plan for our 2018 annual operating budget. This is true for us as a congregation. Our teams have decided and proposed that we will. Reduce my salary and eliminate all four of our paid musical staff positions in the months ahead. A very difficult decision but unanimous. Something that can change in the future based on our financial realities as they may or may not change as we move into the year ahead.

It's no fun it doesn't make sense. How are we going to make our way forward.

Of course there's other challenges that we may be facing that you're perhaps facing. We have heard a number of prayer requests. Of course we know of death in families in our congregation in our community.

Illness hospitalization. The need for healing and sometimes it's mental and sometimes it's our emotions that need healing and sometimes it's our bodies. There's people that aren't sure where their next meal will come from or where they'll sleep tonight. And maybe you find yourselves in those places as well. It's

a difficult time so with all of this going on what exactly does it mean to say that God is with us. Khomeini well God is with us. Even.

In circumstances like this. What does that mean for us as a congregation as families as.

As individuals. How do we make our way during the weeks and months ahead. Some of what we know about the gospel story what's true about God. Is that God meets us where we are.

That no matter where you are in your life no matter where we are in the life of our congregation. God it comes to be with us right there. Our God is not indifferent.

God is relational God is good. God draws us to love through grace. God's love is deep and rich and extends to all persons and all of creation. But it doesn't mean that we always get everything that we want.

God's love or following after Jesus doesn't mean that things will always go our way. But what it does mean.

Is that God will be with us uncertainty in the days ahead for a congregation. Perhaps

for your family for your friends for you. Our stories don't always turn out how we hope that they will. Of course sometimes they do.

But of course sometimes they don't. And I don't take that lightly.

And this is life. No matter what. Jesus is God with us. In all circumstances.

One of the things the true Trinitarian remarkable about our faith is that God fully understands and knows us to the core. All of that there is to know about us what's good and bad and ugly. All of the darkness and the light that we find inside of ourselves.

And God can hold them all.

God can hold them all. Our faith affirms this paradox that Jesus was not just fully divine but also fully human. We talked about this when we use the word incarnation God coming to live among us God fully divine and fully human. God came to earth and Jesus Christ and so God knows about pain.

God knows about waiting and not knowing and being afraid. And God knows about joy. Jesus knew that he was sent. So that we in turn might be sent.

As well. Jesus is God with us. In all seasons of life. So we're going to take a closer look at some passages of scripture that remind us of that and.

And see if we can help connect it with our life today.

One of the ways that God is with us is that Jesus is God with us in our pain.

Hear these words from John Chapter 11 starting the thirty third verse.

When Jesus saw her crying and the Jews who had come with her crying also he was deeply disturbed and troubled he said. Where

have you laid him the reply. Lord.

Come and see Jesus began to cry.

You remember this story of course Mary and Martha are good friends of Jesus and His disciples. It hosted him at meals probably more than once. And this was their brother Lazarus who who had been ill and Jesus was off somewhere else. And finally he arrived. He's arrived home it's too late. Lazarus has died. Jesus comes up and says Well where have they laid him and he comes to the tomb and Jesus Christ there at. The tomb. You know what it's like. To cry.

At the grave site of a loved one.

It's painful. And it hurts.

Here's Jesus experiencing pain and hurt.

God knows pain God feels our pain. Jesus wept over Lazarus God Jesus is God with us in. Our pain. Jesus is God with us in uncertainty and fear as well. From

Isaiah 41 Verse 10 says this don't fear. These are the words of god don't fear because I am with you. Don't be afraid for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will surely help you. I will hold you with my righteous strong hand. Now this may or may not come as a surprise to you but I'd like to have things planned out in my life. I like things to go exactly how I have in mind for them to go. My calendar. My task list. And the truth is things don't always go that way when things get out of order. I sometimes don't handle it very well. Nicole describes it this way. Sometimes she says it's like you've got a pencil box

that everything's neatly in order and and just so and then something just comes and messes it up and maybe there's others like that.

I hope there's someone else out there like that not just me but when there was uncertainty about what's coming up when I don't know what the next step is or what the next thing will be for us as a congregation or for our family or for my life. Sometimes I get a little uncertain and when I'm uncertain about what's coming next. Sometimes I begin to be a little bit afraid. When I when I find myself focused on why me control and I need to know exactly what's coming next. Then. Then.

I find myself finding a little bit of fear. Sometimes I wonder if you find yourself in a place like that uncertain about what's coming up.

Uncertainty about what your job will hold or or what the holidays will be like or whether the outcome of this test will be what you had hoped that it would be.

Uncertainty can can bring fear sometimes and yet even in the most difficult circumstances there can be tangible reminders of God's boundless love. Jesus was sent to the world to be with us in our uncertainty and fear. Jesus is God with us in those times.

As well and Jesus is God with us in waiting in waiting.

The season of Advent is one in which we light these candles. Each one we don't like them all at once. We like the one week at a time. And why is that. It's a reminder that we don't always get what we want right away when we wanted. That there is a season of longing of anticipating it helps us slow down and remember that Christ is coming.

Christ is coming at Christmas. It's something that we have in our year Christian year every year. Reminder to slow down and wait but it's not just waiting for Christ this year is anticipating this longing for that day when Jesus will return again and justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. We anticipate that we'd long for that but we also had the chance to live as part of God's kingdom. Now

here and now but it can be hard to wait. Can be hard. To wait. I remember when I was growing up and.

The truth be told even some this year would make a Christmas list and then handed out to people and cross my fingers and hope that maybe they'll get something on the list.

And then you had to wait for it. And then finally being able to open. Whatever it was. The waiting can be hard.

One of the reminders from the Psalms that helps us know how to approach times like this comes from Psalm 46 Verse 10 it says this. Be still.

And know that I am God. I am exalted among the nations. I am exalted in the earth. I found that cultivating inner stillness is difficult for me.

It is a difficult practice particularly during the busy seasons of life like these like Advent and Christmas. There is so much hustle and bustle during the season.

Our way of life doesn't seem to allow room for creating margin for creating stillness for allowing us to wait on whatever it is that's coming.

I think sometimes we avoid silence because we're afraid of what we might find there and I want to suggest that silence is just another place that we might experience God with us. Rooting ourselves in the present is a struggle even though that is the very place where God comes to us in this moment.

In each moment being right here where we are waiting anticipating.

This is where God comes to meet us. When as a community we sit and wait knowing without words that God is present were able to enter into prayer with a spirit of hopeful anticipation.

Waiting is exactly what we do in this season and waiting and prayer creates receptiveness for the gift of Jesus for the gift of whatever might be next.

Jesus is God with us in waiting. Jesus is God with us in times of joy.

Reminded by this story in John Chapter 16 says this When a woman gives birth she has pain because her time has come. But when the child is born she no longer remembers her distress because of her joy that a child has been born into the world in the same way. You have sorrow now but I will see you again and you will be overjoyed. No

one takes away your joy.

Now this is one of those places in the scripture where I have to be honest with you. I'm curious about the author it describes it this way when a woman gives birth. She has pain. No problem. Right

now I clearly don't know what that's like but I imagine and I've heard and it's a pain that's rather indescribable I would imagine. And the author hears as well as you know it's painful but the point is that what's next is what ends up being most important. The birth.

The child. No one takes away your joy.

Jesus told His disciples that he had to go away. He would no longer be with them physically and he uses this metaphor of a woman for giving her pain during childbirth when the birth of the child arrives.

Jesus knew the disciples would experience pain. Yet he also knew their grief would eventually be transformed.

Into joy. And I wonder. If the same might be true for us as a congregation. There is grief and sadness.

Anger more than that during times of correlational transition. I believe that the days ahead for First United Methodist Church are better than the days that have come before.

God isn't finished with us yet. Now I don't know what that looks like exactly but I know that God walks with us. In every day ahead.

In every moment of uncertainty and fear and every moment of stillness and waiting and every moment of joy. Even Jesus is God with us. Even today and that means that we are sent on.

A mission. In Matthew chapter 5 verses 14 through 16 says this These are Jesus words.

You are the light of the world. Sitting

on top of a hill can't be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead they put it on top of a lamp stand and it shines on all who are in the house. In the same way.

Let your light shine before people so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.

This picture of a lamp being placed on a lamp stand. I picture these candles here today. Most of you can probably see this candle here. It's the light of Christ that the light of this candle representing this and you can see it.

Okay here. But what if I pick it up. Maybe you could see it a little bit better. Maybe if I carried it with me. Then other people would be able to see it. Not just those that are here in this room. But if I move it.

And and put it out of the way it's a little bit harder to see.

Maybe some of you can see it. It's still here.

It's the same light. But it's not as visible. As when we lifted up.

And put it in a place where other people can see it.

This idea of being the light of the world is true for us. You and I are called to be a light to other people. Jesus was sent to the world to share his grace and His love to be God with us not just so that we feel good and warm and fuzzy but so that we might be sent out that there are people that are living in darkness. You might be the light. That shines in their life. They

might be the tangible representation of God's love for them what they need to hear it most.

And then it might be possible that somehow that because Jesus was sent to Earth that you also are set out into the world together. All of us are said. And this is the good news that Jesus is God with us in pain in uncertainty and fear in waiting and enjoy in Jesus. God meets us right where we are.

And then sends us out to share that light with other people. This is the good news that we remember that we celebrate. During the season.

The scripture says that because you've experienced the grace of God and Jesus Christ you must let your light shine just as Jesus was sent to us. We are set to embody God's love to others. Our God is not indifferent.

To our circumstances. Our God through Jesus wants to be in a relationship with us. Our God is good. Our God draws us to love. Through grace and as Christ is sent to Earth.

So you and I. So all of us are sent to the world.

We pray with me oh god we need signs of your presence.

Because we don't always recognize it. We ask that you would make yourself known how you would make your presence known for us. As individuals and as a congregation. For those that are grieving the loss of a loved one. For those that are in need of healing are those that are uncertain and fearful for those experiencing great joy. For those.

That are waiting use us we pray. Send us our.

Jesus name Amen.