

Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church
 Fourth Sunday of Pentecost
 Matthew 5:13-14, 21-22, 43-47, John 14:25–27
“A Safe Place to Feel” by Rev. Sue Trigger

Matthew 5: 13-14, 21-22, 43-47:

“You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again? It’s good for nothing except to be thrown away and trampled under people’s feet. You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can’t be hidden. “You have heard that it was said to those who lived long ago, *Don’t commit murder*, and all who commit murder will be in danger of judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with their brother or sister will be in danger of judgment. If they say to their brother or sister, ‘You idiot,’ they will be in danger of being condemned by the governing council. And if they say, ‘You fool,’ they will be in danger of fiery hell. “You have heard that it was said, *You must love your neighbor* and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you so that you will be acting as children of your Father who is in heaven. He makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love only those who love you, what reward do you have? Don’t even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing? Don’t even the Gentiles do the same?”

John 14:25–27

“I have spoken these things to you while I am with you. The Companion, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I told you. “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don’t be troubled or afraid.”

It is good to be home after spending two weeks working with our Presbyterian siblings. It was a wonderful and tiring experience. It was two weeks of the one thing Presbyterians love most – committee meetings! There were committees addressing everything from the structure of our denominational offices to ecumenical relationships, violence in the United States to peacemaking initiatives, immigration to Middle East Peace. People from all around the country and representatives from other countries were there. The Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, the stated clerk of the PCUSA, has often noted that our denomination is well-respected for our priestly and prophetic voice. I’d love to tell you about all of the decisions made, but the work is not done yet. This coming week is when the whole assembly will gather in one giant Zoom meeting to vote on all of the business.

If you've ever been to a General Assembly meeting, you will remember that emotions run high. People are passionate about the work of the church. This assembly was pretty unique though. There was certainly disagreement about issues, but on the whole, the committee meetings were peaceful. The things causing strong emotional reactions were things happening outside the General Assembly. As a committee was addressing our Presbyterian policy on abortion, the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. As the PCUSA was discussing ways to advocate for green environmental policies, the Supreme Court curbed the Environmental Protection Agency's ability to affect powerplant emissions. While the PCUSA was discussing establishing an advocacy committee for LGBTQIA+ justice issues, Justice Thomas said that legislation concerning gay rights and contraception should be reconsidered. I was standing outside of the violence committee meeting room waiting to present the report on gun violence when another resource person came down the hall and shared that *Roe v. Wade* had just been overturned. It felt like a gut punch.

Some of you have been deflated by other issues. Some have had health care issues or have cared for a loved one who is dealing with health issues. Some have had Covid or been exposed to someone with Covid and felt the stress or fear of serious illness. Two members of the committee I serve on tested positive for COVID while we were at the assembly. One of them was my ride to dinner after a long meeting during which I sat next to the other. I worried that I might have exposed our grandson who was scheduled for his first vaccine on Thursday. I've been tested three times now and thankfully they were all negative.

We've all had a lot to deal with these last two weeks.

Others are at the other end of the emotional scale. Some are feeling a sense of relief at the Supreme Court decisions. Some are enjoying new babies and new grandbabies. Some are preparing to send their children to college or a new school. There is a lot of joy happening in people's lives, too.

While we were away, I was thinking about all of you at home knowing that the news was having a personal impact on you. I was thinking of those who may be feeling afraid of what the Supreme Court

may do next. We are an Earth Care congregation; I knew that the EPA decision would upset many of you. I was thinking about those of you dealing with difficult health issues and those preparing for joyful moments. I have a feeling that many of you are feeling like I have been feeling; like we are riding an emotional roller coaster, up and down and up and down.

The PCUSA has designated today Immigration Sunday. I was all set to talk about the impact of climate change on immigration and to share the church's commitment to caring for immigrants. I am grateful for the work we are doing to help provide safety for those who are fleeing their homes due to war, violence, and because their homeland can no longer provide sustainable life. There is an overture on immigration that will be voted by the General Assembly that will impact the way Presbyterians approach immigration. There is much that we can learn and do, but as I prepared for this morning, I couldn't escape the feeling that what we need today is a safe space to process all we've been feeling.

The church should be that place, shouldn't it? You would think that a church would be a place where everyone feels that their hearts are protected. But that is not always the case. If you ask people outside of the church, you will often hear say that the church evaluates people; judging and punishing one another for sins and shortcomings. We have some work to do to overcome those assumptions about who we are, but today I am concerned about you.

In the reading we heard from Matthew, Jesus touched on concerns about hospitality, concern for the body, and concerns about spiritual practices and relationships. Jesus understood our human tendencies towards anxiety, exclusivism, and judgement, but he believed we could be better. He showed us that when we are at our best, we are a safe place for people to be vulnerable and share their deepest emotions, their most secret stories. Jesus intended his community of followers to be a safe place to feel. Today we need that place.

I invite you to take a couple minutes to just be present with the feelings of your heart. In the safety of this space, open your heart and share your feelings with God. Make yourself as comfortable as

possible, close your eyes and breathe in the safety of the Holy Spirit and give yourself permission to feel the emotions you are carrying.

(pause to reflect)

Friends, we are not alone. God is present to guide and help us. It is my prayer that you were able to feel safe today. I pray that you were able to touch the emotions you have been carrying and entrust them to God, not so that God will take your emotions away, but so that you know that the Holy Spirit is with you and will travel this journey with you.

I don't think we take enough time to pause and think about how we are doing in making Christ's church an emotionally and spiritually safe place for each other. I hope that you are finding our worship today to be a safe place to feel. I encourage you to think about how to create that safe space in our committee meetings and Bible studies, in Sunday school and in fellowship time. I hope that we can all work on that together, but for now, in this moment, may we rest in the safety of God's love knowing that we are being equipped to share that safety with others.