

Called to Join God's Holy Work

By Rev. Karen Wright, June 22, 2025

Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church, 40th Anniversary Worship

As it says in Psalm 100, I do believe we entered the courts with joyful noise and with singing this morning, and I want to just take a moment to thank all our musicians this morning. Music is such a part of the heartbeat of Grace Covenant, and we're grateful that we have been able to have so many musicians' past, present, and some future ones as they were up here early in the service to bring us God's word through song. Paul's text in Romans, did you notice the pronouns? If God is for us, who is against us? See, Paul didn't write this to individuals. This was written to a community. This is Paul writing to a community, a group of people bound together not by preference or convenience, but bound together in the spirit by faith, by mission. And this morning, as we celebrate 40 years, this word is for us, this is a word to our community, the voices, the stories that we will hear around the tables that no doubt some have been shared already. The baptisms, the laughter, the hard times, all those stories have bound us together as a family, as a community. We are the people of God, and this word is for us.

And anniversaries are more than a time to gather with a nostalgic view. Those moments of, well, we always used to do, we've always done it that way. See, we always have some golden age of the church. I don't even know what that means, but we all have one. You have a moment in your mind when Grace Covenant was at the pinnacle. But anniversaries are not about that nostalgia. You see, anniversaries are milestones. They're markers in time. If you go back to the Old Testament stories, they built altars because something special happened. They built an altar to remember that God was present with them in that moment, and they named it. Jacob has a dream while sleeping with his head on a rock, and he builds an altar because his dream was angels descending and ascending a ladder to heaven. He named it Beth El the house of God. It was the way they told the story of the people because something happened in that place. That's what a 40th anniversary does. Here we tell the story of how we have encountered God in this place, how we have encountered God as this community, how God's been at work in our individual lives and our lives as a gathered body.

And so, part of an anniversary marks God's promises and God's faithfulness in this moment, but it also is a way that we look to what is next. And when we step into what's next, we must be honest with what we've walked through together. And so, we have to look at all of the wonderful, amazing times and the hard times too, and not just hear, but in the world. I have no doubt that most of you had heard the news late last night that the US military bombed three nuclear sites in Iran. There's lots of uncertainty and fear, but in 40 years, that's not the first time this fear and uncertainty have reared its ugly head.

The Challenger explosion, the Oklahoma City bombing, 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, more mass shootings than we can ever actually comprehend. You see, there's no shortage of heartbreak and how have we done that? But together because in these times and moments of fear and uncertainty, it's having a community. It's having a family to gather. It's to gather and to worship, it's to weep. But it's also to remember that God has promised to be with us and to trust in those promises as God has been with God's people through the ages. And this Romans eight text tells us nothing. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, nothing.

So, there's something very holy about that kind of stubborn hope, that place that we hold onto God's promises and say, no, this is not how the world is supposed to be. And it's with that fierce love, that refusal to

give into fear, the refusal to give into apathy or despair. I came across a poem this morning from an Irish Indian poet named Nikita Gill. I had never heard of her until this morning. She has many poetry books out. I have them on my wish list now. And this one captured where I was in the moment this morning. The rage you are feeling comes from the same place inside your heart as love. This is why you refuse to accept a world where cruelty rains and the fire consumes all you've known hope and joy and kindness like you have known water and justice is a river that demands you Do not give up on it.

Grace Covenant, for 40 years you have not given up. You've known the water of hope, and you've poured it out generously. You've opened the doors to those in need. You've gone out as the hands and feet of Christ in mission here and in the world. You have stood for inclusion when others would not. You've fed your neighbors, you've marched for justice, you've comforted the grieving, and you've held each other through unimaginable loss. That kind of love is not from us alone. It comes from the God whose love can never be separated from us. It comes from God who through the Holy Spirit is moving in and through this body each day. It comes from a God that has shaped who Grace Covenant has become.

Just like a choir is made up of many voices. It's not just the solo, that's the beauty, it's the harmonies. It's the blending of all the voices. And that's what happens when we as a community sing together, knowing that a 40th anniversary could not be held for one week. Last week we talked a little bit about history, how in the early days there was a lot of discerning on the mission and discerning of what this place would look like and what would be bumps along the way, of course, more than one person in a room always disagrees. I can disagree with myself, but in those bumps on the road, in those hiccups, that's where strength is found.

It's in that resistance. And so in Romans, Paul's telling this young community in the middle of Rome where Christians are being persecuted. Paul says that not hardship or distress or persecution, nothing. Nothing can separate us from God's love. And that's a truth that has been here, that's been present here for the past 40 years. It's a truth that continues as we look forward to what God is doing around us. God's love doesn't shrink back when trouble happens. This is when communities can become courageous. And I want you to think of the ways in which this community has supported you and your family and your loved ones.

It shows up in meals that arrive after a baby, after an illness, after a death. It shows up in the music as God's word is proclaimed in song. It shows up in the love that people find for one another, for the joy that's shared through vacation Bible school, for all the children's ministry programs that teach these children, that they are warm and wonderful and beloved children of God. What we know in the gospel is God is already at work. God is at work reconciling the world, and our job is to join in that work. We don't have to create it from scratch.

We just must participate. We get to be the hands and feet of faith. So, as we give thanks for the last 40 years, let's not get stuck in the way we've always done it. Let's look forward to the way in which God wants us to move. Let us be a people who trust that we trust God's promises, that we love enough to take risks for the gospel, that we will continue to cross boundaries, that we will continue to extend hospitality, that we will continue to speak truth, to embody grace, and to love with a love that comes from God. Anniversaries tell us where we've been and even more, they tell us where we're headed. So, as we go forward, let us carry that unshakeable promise deep within our souls that no matter what comes, whether it be joy or struggle, whether it be disaster or peace, whether it be hope or heartbreak, we are never alone. And nothing, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.