Dear Ones in Christ,

I greet you in the name of the One who is Love. Let us quieten our hearts to hear God’s word for us today.

Today’s reading comes from Amos 5:21-24

21 I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. 22 Even though you offer me your  burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them;      and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. 23 Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. 24 But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness  like an ever-flowing stream.

I chose these verses instead of the Lectionary Psalm for this Sunday because I have had conversations this week with folks about whether churches are re-opening or staying closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I miss gathering in churches as much as anyone. I feel the ache in my soul to gather with others and then I question myself as to why and what is the purpose of church anyway.

In the majority of churches I have served during ministry gathering on Sundays for worship became so predictable. There were those who would tell me when I “stepped out of line” preaching about something of which they did not want to hear. Often the Passing of the Peace was a gossip time, not a time of honestly offering the Peace of Christ to one another. And then there were those who would stand up and walk out if worship went one second beyond when church should end.

In this passage God reminded the people what was really important. It was not the solemn assemblies, nor offerings nor even the songs. What was really important then is still most important now - let justice and righteousness roll down.

Going back into church buildings won’t accomplish what is important. In fact, our call to justice and righteousness has always and still does take us beyond the walls of a building out into our communities. I can’t help but wonder whether our time would be better spent focusing on how we let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-slowing stream while we continue to practice social distancing rather than when we’re going to get back into church buildings.

I don’t have answers, however I am willing to talk with any and all who want to explore such options. I will also pray for each and every one of you as you wrestle with God’s call to you to make justice and righteousness flow where you are right now.

Please pray with me.

God of grace and glory, As you have called us from the comfort of our pews into unknown journeys of the soul, guide our feet towards working for justice and righteousness even as we long for the comforts of the past. Give us wisdom to follow You as we care for others during these trying times. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

Rev. Janice Stamper