

Grace and Peace to you from the one in whom we live and move and have our being! Amen

Ascension Lutheran church it is good to be home with you again even though it looks a little different these days. For those of you who do not know me yet, my name is Melissa Hrdlicka. I joined Ascension with my family in 2012. I bring you greetings from the Lutheran School of Theology of Chicago where I have just finished my second year of four.

A question I have gotten a lot since quarantine started in March is, "what have you been doing to keep busy?" And I guess, right now my answer is finally reading--or trying to read--all the books I have been collecting on my bookshelf.

The book I am reading right now is called "Wishful Thinking; A seeker's ABC" By Frederick Buechner. It is like a dictionary of terms often found in the bible and he explains these words in this deeply poetic way that also shows a profound knowledge of theology.

But I have to admit, I am only kind of reading the book. Only kind of because I will read a definition and then I have to stop and think about it for a long time so I am only reading a page a day.

This week, the word that stopped me was "Holy." Truly a beautiful word found in scripture, song, and liturgy. Buechner says, "Only God is holy, just as only people are human....To speak of anything else as holy is to say that it has something of God's mark upon it."

I found this explanation to be beautiful. And I expected his next few paragraphs to be about holy communion or holy baptism or the holy church. But instead he describes in great detail a workshop attached to a barn. And he says this place, which might seem ordinary to some, is holy to

him. "For reasons known only to God, it is one of the places God uses to send God's love through the world."

It is in his words I realize I also know holy places in my daily life like the workshop he describes.

I can picture my grandpa's workshop next to his barn that looks out on the rolling Wisconsin farm fields.

It is my mom's craft room where she carefully arranges cards and scrapbooks.

It is on a bicycle following my dad's winding path through a city I only thought I knew.

It is a cement seat at Waypost as the fire crackles and the sunsets behind the chi-rho.

Or a van pack with students and adult leaders preparing for a mission trip.

Holy is in a crowd of people marching and crying out for justice.

It is in my dorm room as I unwrap a box from Tracy and the youth group with a quilt after my grandparents died.

Holy is the buzz of energy on the last and first days of school. It is a brunch table surrounded by friends and family.

Holy is the sound of the Fox River and the comfort of a familiar family cabin.

Holy is in the sound of hundred people reciting the ancient words of the Lord's Prayer and the moment you remember a loved one's laughter.

Can you feel it? Hear it? See it? Touch it?

Pause for a moment and recall your moments of experiencing the Holy in your life. Where God has marked your life? Where spaces has God used to send God's love through?

(Long Pause)

As we learn how to live in this traumatic time of a global pandemic, some of these holy places and holy moments may feel out of reach, hard to get to, changed somehow by new COVID precautions. These moments of holy may feel like old memories and not recently lived experiences. For a time, many of us thought even partaking in the holy sacrament of communion was out of reach as well.

The world is changing around us, faster than we can comprehend. It is easy to get so swept up in the worries of the world or try to drown out the worries, and we end up missing the moments of holiness amongst us.

But no matter how turbulent our daily lives can become, we can, of course, always come back to the holiness of church and worship even with the changes.

The first way is remembering God has marked each and everyone of us as holy. On the day of your Baptism, a pastor marked you with the sign of the cross. You are marked as holy. You are a place God uses to send God's love through.

Secondly, while we are not able to gather in this space at this time, we are able to gather digitally. Your home is marked as holy as it has become a place of worship.

And today, as you drive through the church parking lot, your hands and your mouth will once again taste and experience the holy in communion. Even though it is not how we have always done it, the words of institution have marked these elements as holy.

As we read in Matthew, this meal you are partaking in was shared by the disciples thousands of years ago and connects us to generations of Christians before us and after us. The ancient words we take from 1 Corinthians have been uttered by the first churches until now. While it may feel like a moment of solitude in your own vehicle, we are all still partaking in this meal together.

As you recite the Lord's Prayer in your own home, may you hear it join the communion of saints and this community all across the Fox Valley. In this holy moment of communion, may you feel the connection to the divine and to this community.

Dear holy ones, remember this: neither life nor death, nor COVID or quarantine nor anything else in creation can separate you from the love and holiness of God

2020 has been a hard year for all of us in different ways. My prayer for you this day is you find moments of Holiness in yourself as you remember your baptism, in this holy communion meal we partake in together, and I pray you catch moments of holiness in the world around you this week.

Amen.