



The Elim Scribe



Reflections from Pr Bruce ~

Sabbatical Thoughts

Twelve states, four time zones and over six thousand miles. Our time away has been very valuable. Thank you for the gift of refreshment, travel, and study. I have had numerous conversations with both pastors and lay people. Most of my opening questions for them were focused on how Covid and our political divide has affected them and their churches.

Before sharing some of their answers, it is worth noting that every congregation I spoke with has lost and gained members. Churches that required masks and went to online services during the more intense Covid days lost members—between 40-60%. That is significant. Nearly all of them have lost children and youth. Several congregations that still have some youth attending are responding by formation of collaborations with other churches for youth and children's ministries.

One pastor's comment was that his membership before Covid and after Covid has changed to the point of having an entirely new congregation. All the pastors I spoke with expressed a range of emotions, from frustration and fatigue to wonder and curiosity about how to move into the future. Nearly all agreed that this is both a scary time to do ministry and an exciting time of change and opportunity.

A common factor was that members who had contemplated moves took the hiatus from in-house worship to online worship as an opportunity to change membership and/or place of worship. A number of individuals have simply stopped attending. The stress of Covid and the political chaos has reduced our patience and attention spans.

Part of the bewildering tension is knowing how to maintain the delicate balance between progressive and conservative members. There are numerous hot points—climate change, pro-life and abortion, race and white privilege, LGBTQ issues, the political divide of election deniers and election woes, political violence, etc. Add to that divide, conservative vs. progressive theology, creation vs. evolution, how we read and understand the Bible, etc. Ministry today is like doing a waltz through a mine field. Pastors strive to minister to all their members, regardless of political affiliation and opinions on very touchy topics that carry very high emotional voltage. No one has a magic wand or fix-all formula. Some clergy have simply said, "Enough! This is a great time to resign and/or quit the ministry," just as some members have made the choice to simply become invisible.

My longer report includes summaries of some of these valuable conversations. I won't share those here. I did a lot of varied reading. I will list the books and short summaries as a separate document if you are interested in knowing what I have read and my thoughts about those topics.

As traveled I have continued my discipline of Bible reading. A passage from the Acts of the Apostles (10:9-48) "jumped out at me." I have been wrestling with what God might be saying to us through this brilliant passage. It is too long to include here, but, in summary, it is about God opening Peter's heart, mind and soul to what God is doing today (present tense).

God's very specific requirements for the people of God in the Old Testament included strict observation of dietary laws and the mark of circumcision. Included in these two laws would be all the extreme clean-versus-unclean regulations. To violate these laws meant expulsion from the people of God and the nation of Israel, or worse—death. That is how serious these laws were. The early disciples, including Peter and Paul, were devout and faithful Jews, very faithful in adhering to these laws. Then, Jesus and the cross, the

resurrection and Pentecost changed everything. Did I say everything? Yes. Everything.

The summary - Peter was hungry and wanted something to eat. God interrupted his plans by showing him a vision of all kinds of clean and unclean animals, reptiles, birds, fish, etc. descending from heaven on a sheet. A voice instructed Peter, "rise, kill and eat." Three times this happened. And three times Peter said, "I have never eaten anything profane or unclean."

God's response was, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." Immediately after that vision Peter was called to proclaim the Gospel message of Jesus to a group of non-Jews. A cataclysmic earthquake was shaking God's people. The do-or-die laws of the Old Testament suddenly were out of date and no longer applied. Dietary laws. Circumcision. Those laws were deeply embedded in faithful Jewish theology and thinking. No wonder that Paul, before his conversion, was so intent on destroying Jesus and the followers of the Way. No wonder that Paul faced such tremendous opposition after his conversion. But God was on the move. Jesus has changed everything.

What has changed? What remains unchangeable? What does it mean to be faithful to God and to the message of the Bible today? I am excited to still be a pastor serving God's people. I am excited to grapple with and wrestle with how to do ministry in the changing context of today's world. God's Spirit is very much alive and at work in our midst. God is on the move. Elim is still a vibrant, growing congregation. And that is great news.

I am back. I am glad and excited to be back. Thank you for the gift of my sabbatical. Yours in Christ

Looking Ahead

Fall Festival Wednesday, 5:30 p.m. November 9

Join us, plus members of Peoples Church, Iglesia Crecimiento Cristiano, students from Weber State and our neighboring Veteran's Home. Sign-up to bring soup/chili, bread/crackers, carrot/celery sticks, dessert or fruit.

Church Becoming Workshop II, November 20

Rev. Dana Petersen, from the Rocky Mountain Synod, will be our guest preacher and workshop leader. The 1-hour workshop will take place following the morning service.

Sunday Services at Wahlen Veterans Home:

Elim will resume services at the veterans home on the first Sunday of each month at 1 P.M. Pr Bruce is starting November 6th. Background checks are now required for all who participate; Pr Bruce has completed that. We need help with singing and the service! Please complete a background check (applications are available in the church office) and join us. Thank you.

Decorating for Advent on Sunday, November 27th, after worship.

Custodian Position Opening

Elim is in need of a custodian. If you are interested or know of someone who may be interested, please contact one of our council members. Job description, pay, and hours to be negotiated.

