

*Of Whirlwinds and Fire: a Year in the Life of Calvary Lutheran Church*

Annual Pastor's Report

August 28, 2022

"A lightning strike and fire alarms, all in one month. What does that say about Calvary?!" This was a comment made by a member of the Council at a recent meeting. It is a metaphor which describes the past year in the life of this congregation, a year of lightning bolts of change, the fire of resiliency and living in the midst of burning bushes and tongues of fire, a community in which the Spirit continues to move and speak and act and shape and reshape our life together.

For every congregation, for every household, this has been a year of emergence from the tomb of Covid. It has been an entry into the blinding reality of a "new normal." With it there is uncertainty and anxiety, Covid continues its presence and in places our muscle memory has faded. Is it safe to serve a funeral lunch? And then, how did we do this again? To mask or not to mask, that is the question. Now that we are back in worship, how did we do communion again? Basic, basic questions. The community of Calvary for awhile was estranged and then came back rearranged. It will continue to be a community present and on-line, now providing worship and care to strangers and neighbors in Florida and Arizona, Texas and Iowa and literally "to the ends of the earth!" Whirlwinds and fire, excitement and anticipation.

- A year of *hellos and goodbyes*. Lightning bolts of farewell to beloved Senior Pastor Genelle Netland and Preschool Director Joan Meulebroeck. There was the excitement of hellos to a new vicar, Jami Goetz, the arrival of Aaron Bieberdorf and the capable skills of Amanda Willis, together with the gifts of Rayne Heck. The farewells led to hellos to Tony Kerr as the new Preschool Director, a new pre-school teacher and a stranger from the East, Pastor Susan Tjornehoj who would attempt to lead as Interim Senior Pastor in the absence of so-loved Pastor Genelle. And more farewells to Vicar Jami and Aaron and Amanda. This is the whirlwind part of the title.
- But God's mission, the energy and resiliency of Calvary simply has no bounds. 28 young people were confirmed, 40 received the life-giving water of baptism, 26 publicly declared Calvary to be their church home. We mourned the loss of 11 loved ones who now rest in the arms of Jesus. The Explore Team provided the opportunity to listen to the community, to each other and to God from Epiphany to Lent. Conversations with over 30 community leaders, a Lenten theme of listening to God through daily devotions and Bible study and soup and bread and podcasts gave pause and the thrill of 1000s of post-it notes containing the dreams and visions of over 200 members of Calvary, well the Spirit is clearly in this place. A sacred whirlwind of love for Calvary and a fearlessness about its future.
- Not one but two mission trips and the daily blessing of children's voices at the preschool, the about-to-be confirmed statements of faith, the rhythm of confirmation and Team and choir practice, quilters quilting and crafters crafting, men and women studying scripture and the prayer chain praying, all of these things are the rich soil of the people of Calvary being the people of God. Some ran for God and others zoomed to do some theology. The altar guild prepared the meal each week and readied the font, tending to the center of our life together with great grace and gentleness. Each month the community stretches beyond its walls to tend to the vulnerable in the community and the world. Many from Calvary live out their faith by delivering meals, tending to the food shelf and volunteering where the need is greatest. GriefShare blessed many this past year. Outdoor worship returned and the weather was our ally and the musicians generous.

2022-2023 A whirlwind of Spirit, of energy, of challenge

- Rally Sunday, September 11, will continue the process of *leaning into* the vision shared through the listening process. Sunday morning worship times will create a space for education of all ages! Pre-K to

95. Sunday School, Adult Education, coffee, something for everyone. Thank you for all of those who are already volunteering to make this happen. Wednesday nights will see the return of CalvaryAlive!

- The sacred and holy spaces will open at the columbarium at the Calvary Cemetery.
- A generous gift will enable to Calvary to share the Light of Christ or “Love at 55” as new signage along the highway. Calvary really is the welcome center, the front porch, the entry into Bemidji and places north. What an opportunity to share the good news of Christ!
- In the coming year Calvary will welcome a new Senior Pastor and Director of Faith Formation. Thank you to the Call Committee and the interview team who have invested so much on behalf of Calvary and its mission. We pray that the Spirit continue to do its work.
- The Budget reflects the bold vision of the listening process. It is a mission plan that stretches our current giving patterns, but we can do this! A newly formed Stewardship of Giving team (soon to be joined by Stewardship of Land and Community teams!) will educate, encourage and challenge each of us in the spiritual discipline of giving and help to shape a culture of generosity and help us discover the simple joy of giving.

Thank you to a dedicated Staff who remain stalwart and committed to the mission of Jesus Christ here at Calvary. They have said many goodbyes and welcomed strangers while simply doing their daily tasks. And in the coming year, this rhythm will continue. They are Rock Stars. And to the Council who has led and led and led as Calvary awakens to the challenge and energy of the next years. Their courageous and faithful work has moved us into an even wider welcome, with a Welcome Statement in the works and the clarity that the Call Committee be open to the very best candidates, period. Their consistent leadership, coupled with devotion to God, to Calvary and this community is inspiring and will serve this congregation in the coming years. And thank you members and friends of Calvary. You continue to inspire me with your dedication and devotion, your tenacity and ability to feel the grace at the center of the whirlwind and to recognize the Spirit at work.

All of this is to say, Calvary has been blessed to be a blessing. You have such capacity to continue and expand the work of Jesus Christ. Do not hide your light; let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!

Thank you for your wide welcome, for your fire and your passion for the Gospel,

Pastor Susan Tjornehoj, Interim Senior Pastor