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“There is no fear in love, for perfect love casts out fear.” –1 John 4:18

This verse from St. John has always been important to me. Never more so than of late, as we are living in a time of heightened fear. People fear different things for different reasons, but the significant rise in fear in our community over events that transpired across this past summer, fall, and now winter is exacting a heavy individual and civic toll.

As Christians, we are called to overcome fear with love, to place our ultimate hope in God, and to work for peace that is rooted in fairness. I believe that the members of our congregation respond to this calling every day in a variety of settings and ways: by caring for our children as teachers in our schools and childcare centers, by working for the wellbeing of our community as healthcare professionals, by building our homes and businesses through the professional trades, by helping our communities prosper through business and civic leadership, by tending to emergencies as first-responders, by caring for our neighborhoods through volunteering, and by strengthening our communities simply by being good neighbors to each other.

All of these and more are ways we try to share God’s love that casts out fear. Yet that doesn’t make us immune to fear. Of late, for instance, I find myself fearful that our city and broader metro area are at a tipping point, with the potential for more violence. I am afraid that in the current political environment, recent events will divide our congregation along partisan lines rather than unite us in a desire to share God’s love in word and deed. I worry that we are putting our local law enforcement officers and first responders in an untenable and dangerous position. And, most of all, I am deeply concerned that the lives of the most vulnerable among us, including especially immigrants and people of color, are becoming ever more difficult. Perhaps you share these fears; perhaps you harbor others.

Yet amid these fears, I also live with a hope informed both by God’s great love for us in Christ and by our shared commitment to our mission and to each other. We have been through a lot together, including the difficulties of a world-wide pandemic and, more recently, the tragedy at Annunciation Church and School. We have a pastoral and lay staff that responds with care and compassion to the needs of all our members without regard to their political affiliation, frequency of attendance, or level of giving. And we have a congregation that regularly responds to the call for compassion for those in need with tremendous generosity.

With this level of shared commitment and trust, and confident of God’s presence and guidance, we will continue to respond to the needs of our neighbors and community during this challenging time informed by some of our central beliefs: that each and every person is created in the image of God and deserves to be treated with dignity; that lawful government is a gift from God meant to be both respected and held accountable for executing its responsibility to care for all of God’s children; and that we are always blessed in order to be a blessing to others, especially to those in need.

For all these reasons, I trust that while we may at times disagree on particular issues, events, and policies, we can remain united in our calling to love our neighbor. Toward that end, we have reached out to some of our partner agencies to see how we can be of greatest service to our community during this fraught time. Our hope is to offer ways, both as individuals and as a congregation, to make a difference in the lives of our neighbors and share that love which casts out fear. (You can find those opportunities via the link on the email accompanying this letter.)

Each Sunday, we close worship with “The Prayer of Good Courage,” introduced by these words: “As we depart worship for service in God’s world, we ask God to grant us faith and courage sufficient to the challenges of the day.” That prayer has never been more urgent or salutary, and so I close with it now, inviting you to pray it as well: Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Lose