

November 1, 2021



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Greetings,

You show me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy. (Psalm 16:10)

In our current sermon series during Sunday worship, we have been considering how the original concept of Christianity as “The Way of Jesus Christ” helps us understand not only what the Church was originally called to do and be, but how we as the First Presbyterian Church of Bethlehem can discern our own calling as individuals and a congregation through that understanding.

The sermon series is called “On the Way” to help us remember that our faith is a journey that is already in motion, and which is carrying us forward along a way that has been laid out for us, in the sense of a road or a path. It’s a particularly helpful image for us in this moment in which we find ourselves. This time last year, we were realizing that the pandemic was going to be a journey rather than a mountain to climb: a road that would go over multiple peaks and through different valleys, rather than a single arduous climb and back down the other side. And so our focus as a congregation was really about we could and should care for one another and for our neighbors in this time and on that journey, sharing God’s love as we all tried to get through to an “end” in which we could put the trials of this pandemic road behind us.

A year later, while the journey has not ended, we find ourselves in a different place on it. Many of us are gathering in person for worship and education and service and simply to be with one another again; that first Sunday we gathered together in person to worship in the presence of God for the first time in well over a year did give us a new sense of the “fullness of joy,” as the Psalmist calls it. We have had similar experiences in our education and service and fellowship ministries in many ways.

Yet in all of this we have avoided the language of “going back,” as in “going back to normal.” Part of that is an awareness that there are some things that we want to reclaim from before the pandemic that we are not able to do yet. But more importantly, I think, we have a new understanding that we are not called to go back, but to go forward, to continue on the “path of life” that God shows us and embodies for us in the presence and power of Jesus Christ into the future. It is not simply a path of life in terms of living as surviving, but living as thriving. Jesus came not simply to keep us alive, but so that we “might have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). That is the path of abundant life on which we are being called and invite to go forward as a congregation.

I am energized and excited for us to be on that journey together. There are extraordinary opportunities and needs for us to embrace through our ministries of worship, education, service, and fellowship. Our congregational leadership has been actively exploring those opportunities in preparation for this widening turn in the path, and there are new experiments in the works to carry our life and ministry together forward in all of these areas and more.

We have also added some key staff with a full-time Director of Business Administration and a new full-time facilities position so that we have the capacity to support this kind of missional expansion.

This is a crucial season of opportunity for us as a congregation to make a profound impact in this struggling world together. Your generous support through making and fulfilling a financial pledge to help us do that is also crucial to our success. So please give prayerful consideration to what a generous pledge for you would be to help drive us along the path of abundant life that is before us, and how you can add your own presence and perspectives and calling to our ministry together as we step into 2022.

Grace and Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J.C. Austin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

The Rev. J.C. Austin
Senior Pastor