

Letter to Artisan

GREETINGS

From Erin, who in God's joyful sense of humour, has been drawn by the Spirit to pastor at Artisan Church. [Paul speaks of being an apostle by the will of God. And the language of being drawn by the Spirit is my version of that. And I say it because I want you to be encouraged: I believe deeper things are at work than what you and I and we can see.]

To the post-Covid crew that shows up at the Japanese Hall each Sunday to explore and practice the way of Jesus with each other.

Let's not say much else before we name God's generosity to us.

Grace.

And then I'll pass the peace to you as well. [I know this is a polarizing tradition at Artisan. But this offer of peace isn't accomplished by socializing. It's the shalom of a Creator healing your relationship with every person and part of creation you deal with regularly.]

Social wholeness.

So, to use Paul's language: grace and peace.

PRAYERS OF GRATITUDE:

In the middle of a city that's full of lonely people, within a faith tradition that feels threatened despite its power, in a world that's full of unfathomable violence...

I thank God for this community.

I've seen the way you join the Creator in being hospitable, I've heard your desire for faith - your courage to jump out of the nest and try flying, and I've seen the way the Spirit helps you to find hope in spite of climate doom and long shifts and relapses.

You're here.

So at some point, Jesus must have taken hold of your imagination or curiosity. At some point, you must have experienced Jesus' Way as full of possibility. At some point, having a living connection with your Creator must have helped you to see the world in a different way. Seeing power in the

powerless, being welcomed by those unhoused, desiring to live simply and generously, continuing to do good when it doesn't benefit you. That's the power of the gospel at work in you.

And another reason for thanks: the fruit of the gospel doesn't grow only here. We've seen it across the globe.

If I were to put all this gratitude in a sentence, it would go like this: hold on to faith; I see the fruit of the gospel here in your midst.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION:

And because of that, I haven't ceased...to *want* to pray for you...and I do often pray for you—I'm just not sure I can say unceasingly—[booster words like 'always' make me uncomfortable. Also, being a healthy pastor means deliberately ceasing.]

So, maybe I should just say...I pray for you.

I pray that God will give you sight that extends beyond what is obvious and confirm your faith.

I pray that you'll feel confident to live into the way of Jesus and that you'll be attuned to notice the results of that—how it transforms you and your ways of relating.

And I pray that you can stay out of fight or flight when it comes to faith:

1. that you would know the good news of Jesus is not under threat of extinction;
2. but also that you would find ways to clear Jesus' name of the wrong done by Christians, that you would have chances to explain the beauty and the healing in Jesus' way.

Some days, this good news of generosity and social wholeness based on the teaching of a 1st century Palestinian might sound like fantasy. But don't forget that learning about Jesus' way has helped us to imagine and hold hope for a healed world, a world of justice and peace; and living into that radical way has the powerful potential to actually heal, bring peace, and restore equity.

So feed your living connection with God. Don't stop praying in whatever ways you can and don't stop giving thanks. As NT Wright puts it, paraphrasing Paul, "A life lived in the presence of this God will be a life full of thanksgiving."

Pray for us, the leadership of Artisan. That we'll be wise and full of gratitude. That we'll respect the mystery of Christ and stay alert to what God's doing.

Nelson, my fellow prisoner greets you. He says: "May you know, in your very bones, the belovedness from which you cannot be separated."

And Intern Tim, who is also called Chicago Tim, greets you too: He prays that "Artisan Church continues to extend genuine hospitality and welcome to all those who come through our doors."

Scott, who I bear witness has worked hard for you, passes on his gratitude "to everyone who calls Artisan home. Special shout out to Randy for coming at 8:30am almost every Sunday morning to help set up since our beloved sister, Karen Lahay, died in September of 2021."

I, Erin, speak this greeting with my own mouth. [type this with my own keyboard]

Remember my fetters.

Grace be with you.