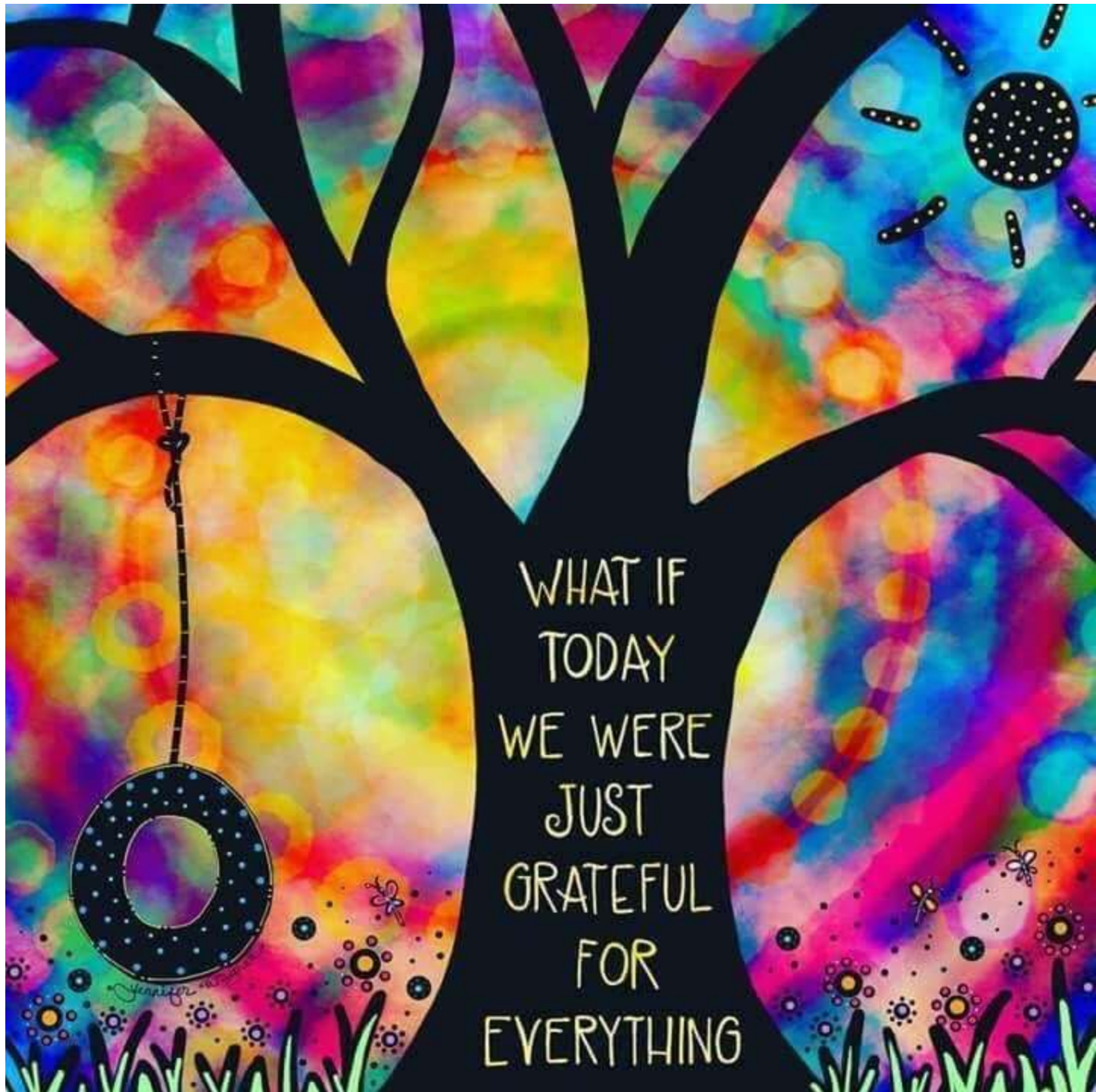


The Question of Re-Opening the Church for Worship

It has been asked of church leadership when we might re-open the building for in-person worship. A Strategic Planning Team (Karen Graham, Chair) has been formed to study the science and logistics of when, how, and if we re-open our building. For the foreseeable future, we will not be in the sanctuary. The overwhelming weight of opinion is that during this pandemic it is dangerous to congregate there. Some of you may be disappointed at this news—we get it. We all miss each other.

But trust this-worshipping in person right now-or soon-would not be very satisfying: we would all have to wear masks and maybe gloves, too. We couldn't sing or say our prayers out loud. Your pastor would have to stand far, far away (at least 27 feet from the closest parishioner). We could only seat about 1/3 of our pre-pandemic attendance at any one service due to distancing requirements and State limits on the number of people who may gather in churches at one time. We would not be able to serve Communion, perform hands-on Baptism, hear the choir sing, invite the children up for their time with the pastor or safely provide classes for them, pass the Offering plate, serve food or drink for hospitality or congregate before or after the service. We would have to have reservations for seating and monitor people for temperature and compliance with masking as they came in. We would have to hire a professional cleaning crew for disinfection after every service, at considerable expense.

Basically, yuk. It wouldn't be the same. It wouldn't be what many of us long for. Even outdoor worship would be problematic, unsafe, and unsatisfying.



Several parishioners have expressed that they love our virtual worship! No longer will our parishioners who are differently abled be denied worship with their beloved church family due to travel restrictions. Those who have difficulty getting up and out and over to UCCPH by 10 am or getting home before dark after special worship services will no longer have to make

painful choices. “Come as you are, for you are enough” takes on new meaning! Folks who are living away from our area, or who are on vacation or in second homes out of the area during the summer or a weekend away, folks who have a church but want to worship with us, too, and those who are hesitant to drive in bad weather all can worship with us without interruption. And if you miss live worship, an easily two clicks on our website gets you the service for playback at a time convenient for you. That is a big YAY!

There are drawbacks, of course, to live worship online: we can’t all sing or say liturgy at once; music is sometimes distorted; and there are glitches in the video feed now and then. Zoom is working hard to improve the usability of their platform, and we have seen great strides in many areas of the technology. Other options don’t come close to what Zoom affords us at a very reasonable cost per year (under \$150).

Many people have expressed that online they are able to more easily hear and pay attention to the message, prayers and liturgy. The slide shows and the videos we couldn’t show in the sanctuary due to lack of audio-visual equipment we can now show on Zoom. It makes the experience so much more immediate and the range of material so varied and rich! We can now put faces with names and see and hear our young ones during Time with the Children and our fellow congregants during Joys & Concerns. Being on Zoom allows us to be interactive and live, rather than pre-recorded (except for the majority of our music). There are many plusses to staying online, safe in our homes, and worshipful in ways we never considered before. On balance, church leadership and I think this is the best option for the church at this time.

Your input is welcome, always. You can email Karen Graham (kgraham23@msn.com) or me (pastortracey@uccparkerhilltop.org). Please let us know what you think.

With gratitude,
Pastor Tracey