

Easter Blessings to All!

Pastor's Ponderings for April 2022

Last month we conducted a survey of people's experiences of worship at Faith Church. Thank you to all who filled out the survey and returned it. The return rate was about 45%, which is statistically fairly good. There was some useful feedback and we have implemented or are implementing a number of suggestions that were made. But we have not yet acted on the one most prominent interest expressed in the survey results: outdoor worship. Of the completed surveys we received, 75% were strongly in favor of having worship outside during the summer as much as possible, and 25% favored outside worship 1-3 times per summer. No one expressed opposition. This is quite remarkable. Such uniformity of opinion is very rare. There are logistical challenges to deal with (seating, shelter, sound system, video streaming/recording), but I hope we can experiment and try out some regular outdoor worship this summer. It may be more significant than just getting out of an enclosed and sometimes stifling sanctuary.

There is a new and interesting form of church I've been hearing about the few couple years. A friend told me about visiting a church in New Hampshire called "Church of the Woods." As they state it on their website, "this is a place where the earth itself, rather than a building, is the bearer of sacredness, a place where people gather for contemplative practice in communion with each other and nature, a place where people come together to learn, explore, and take action to transform themselves and renew the Earth." Of course, there have always been people who prefer nature to "the church," or who make a religion out of some form of nature worship. But this is different. There is an ordained pastor, they celebrate communion and are oriented around the Gospels, but they have formed a church that has no building whatsoever. They meet out in the woods. There is a similar place in the Finger Lakes, not so far from here, called Finger Lakes Forest Church. Again, no building. This is impractical of course, or so it would seem. What do you do in bad weather, or winter in general? But I wonder if it might signal a movement toward an increased desire to connect with and be an explicit and conscious part of God's Creation. It also might have to do with disillusionment with the "confines" of institutionalized Christianity, which is strongly symbolized by the church building.

I wonder if outdoor worship might shift our focus more strongly toward the community around us and might cause the community to more directly notice and perhaps "enter" our presence.

In any case, I'm glad spring is upon us, and I surely look forward to enjoying time being outdoors and in the world. I hope you do too.

Ted