

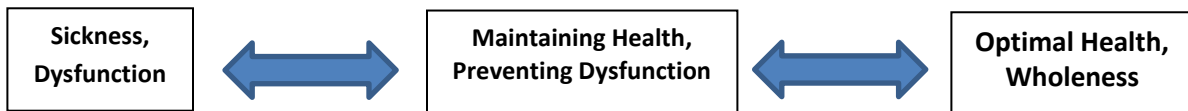
God's People, Moving Toward *Shalom*

We are creatures of habit. Our days and weeks are marked by routine. We awaken and greet each new day, nourish our bodies, work, learn, and then rest again at the end of the day. We refresh our souls through rest, play, prayer and connection. We are creatures of habit. This time of year, advertisers encourage us to get on the New Year bandwagon, touting “new & improved” methods for replacing “bad” habits with “good” habits. I prefer to think of things not in polarizing terms (bad vs. good), but instead to see things on a continuum. In each moment, and with each choice, we can ask ourselves:

Are we moving in the direction of *God's vision for *shalom*?**

(Shalom = wholeness)

What about our neighbors?



**Think holistically, in terms of physical, social, spiritual, financial and emotional health.*

These are the questions we can ask ourselves each and every day.

There is so much in this life that we cannot control. For instance, as individuals we cannot always control how our bodies react to the aging process or to illness. We often do not have influence in parts of the world where God's people are in pain. The recovery community's *Serenity Prayer*, by Reinhold Neibuhr, helps us gain perspective:

*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;
Courage to change the things I can;
And wisdom to know the difference.*

There are ways in which we, as a faith community, can continue to move in *healthy* directions – in directions that seek to live life abundantly through Jesus Christ – and not just for ourselves but for our neighbors as well.

[Jesus said], the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.
- John 10:10 (NRSV)

As a church, we are experiencing a season of transition, especially staff transitions. It's important during this season of change that we would attend to the **health** of this

congregation. Just like returning to healthy eating or abstaining from staying up too late, it's not about finding the perfect new-fangled "magic" solution. Often, it's about returning to the basics – keeping it simple. As people who follow in the way of Jesus, our lives are marked by the rhythms of our Christian faith: ***prayer, the giving of our time and resources, fasting, feasting on the sacred meal of Holy Communion, worship, and Sabbath rest.*** Recommitting ourselves to these practices helps to ground us, in this season of change, in the One who has called each of us by name.

What will it feel like to re-commit ourselves to these soul-honoring, life-giving practices? I imagine it will feel pretty good. The trouble is that change takes us out of our comfort zone into new, unfamiliar territory. And that's just plain uncomfortable. To get where God would have us go, and to be people who are intentionally *joining God at work in the world* day-in and day-out, we ought to get comfortable with the idea of being stretched in new directions.

“We can do anything we want, the trick is, it's usually waiting for us just beyond our comfort zone.” - Julia Pimsleur

I'm in this with you. With God at the helm to steer us forward, and to breathe the Holy Spirit's breath into this new and emerging reality, it's an exciting time to be the church. And remember that *we* (the people of God) are the church. And we're in this together.

In deep gratitude, +

Pastor Julie Wright

P.S. My resolution is a return to healthy eating. What's God whispering in your ear? How will you move in healthy directions this year? (Let's talk! preferably over a cup of coffee – because I'm *not* giving up coffee! That would be *ridiculous!*)