



Grace Note

June 8, 2021

Dear friends of Jesus at First Church Evanston,

Praise God, Church!

After driving four hours from Meru to Nairobi and then flying to Chicago via Doha, it sure is good to be back safe and sound in my Evanston home! I unpacked my suitcase and was surprised that I did not experience the usual



wrenching homesickness but found myself overwhelmed with gratitude. These past few weeks were sheer grace. My cup runneth over! I am now looking forward to face-to-face encounters with each and every one. Pardon me for abandoning cultural etiquette and returning to the old-school pastoral work of knocking on doors! Be warned, your African Pastor is back!

When I landed in Africa, it took a week before my spirit finally felt a calming hush after the pandemic's frenzy. I was a mess and didn't even know it! Looking back, the world had offered no light during the pandemic, just a lot of heat with hostile partisan politics, the scorching heat of deteriorating race relations, and the stressful heat with our children at home with eyes glued to the very screens we worked so hard to wean them from! As if enough was not enough, in our isolation Nick died, Lionel died, Paul died, Mason died, Miriam died, Billy Ray died, Marilyn died, Jack and Bette's daughter died, and the legendary Jean was slipping away without a pastor to take her Holy Communion and hold her hand after her 96 years of faithful membership at First Church. I was so disappointed with myself! Senior Pastor guilt is a real thing.

In Kenya I found that Covid-19 has upended the tourist industry, leaving two million people jobless. So I borrowed Bishop Dad's 4x4, hired a tour driver/guide and went on a day-long safari that I captured as a "Virtual Safari" to share with anyone interested ... for a small price. (Email me for details!) Without the tourist activity in the past year, the animals were easy to find. We found three of The Big Five. (Click [here](#).) At some point my tour guide spotted a herd of 31 buffalos and gasped, "This is an amazing recovery!" It had been fifteen years since he had last seen buffalo this far south. Upon hearing that, I immediately began to wonder where First Church might also gasp at something new in this difficult time. Perhaps someone might gasp at the miracle of our quickly, easily and finally embracing the twenty-first century with our online platform. First Church, we have gone virtual and it is here to stay!

Friends, I am grateful to my SPRC and our DS and First Church staff. And most of all, I am a debtor to God who restores and renews! I returned singing with the psalmist "what shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?" As Bishop Dad reminded me,

“You are not in Evanston to do everything and be everything. You are there to do the one thing God sent you there to do and be. What is that?” I am humbly renewing my commitment to God’s call on my life to love God’s people wherever I might find them and to boldly preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ that all might have life in its abundance.

It is an honor and privilege to be in ministry with you, as you in turn are true to the one thing God has called YOU to do and be in this amazing church’s post-covid life.

See you face to face soon, whether at the park during the summer, or in the sanctuary on Rally Day in September!

Pastor Grace



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