

I do not know what to write to you.

It's not that there is nothing to say - there is too much to say. As I write this, we are preparing for the Great Celebration of the Resurrection, and I am preparing for the day when I will step out of active ministry, and into incapacity leave. That will happen soon. There are details left to be worked out, but my plan is to move in that direction in early summer. I want to stop working while I still am feeling well enough to enjoy Good Time with Wes and the kids. Since one is a teacher and two are college students, that makes this summer my best opportunity to do so. In some ways, it still feels too early - I feel guilty at stepping away when I still have energy to get here. But I have asked myself (and answered) this question over and over: which would I regret more, leaving work too early, or leaving work too late? I would definitely regret more leaving too late. The Church has so often had first claim on my time over the last two decades. My family gets first dibs on this time.

However, I won't leave without being a pastor to you in as many ways as I can before I go. So here are some of the things we have put in place. First, the leadership of the congregation respectfully requested that the Bishop and the cabinet consider moving Jerry Morris to the role of full time Interim Lead Pastor for at least the next year. They have considered our request, and agreed this is the best plan for this time of transition.

Second, we reconsidered May's worship schedule. It's not that "Questions Thinking People Ask About the Bible" isn't an important topic. It's just not the topic I most need to preach right now. Watch for that series at a later time. Instead, I want to preach to you about how my faith has affected my choices in this time, and I want to preach like Paul did in the letter to the Philippians. He was in prison, feeling certain death was near, and writing one more time to a beloved congregation. I want to do that.

And then, since we know that all grief is connected, and my illness is probably stirring up a lot of other painful memories and fears of yours, we are offering a discussion time around the book "Praying Our Goodbyes", about ways to deal with all the losses in life. (See details on page 4). I hope, also, to be able to provide some support for parents of children and youth to talk about death and dying. It is a topic all families face at some point, and few feel prepared.

And finally, I want to make sure you understand some things as we move through the coming weeks. You can talk to me. If you have questions about my health, my plans, church business, please come and ask me. Ask *me*. I will answer as best as I can, or tell you if I cannot, but I will not ever scold you for asking. And at least for the next month or so, I am still your pastor - so you can still come and talk to me about *your* concerns and griefs, even if you worry they seem small in comparison to mine. It's not a competition - your trials are huge for you, and I want to pray for you in yours, as you are praying for me in mine.

As you pray, remember to pray also for Wes, Stephan, Julia, Beth, and my family beyond Wausau, and pray for the rest of the staff. Not just for me. Weep with all who weep. Rejoice with all who rejoice.

And remember: God is good. All the time. All the time.