I am grateful to God--whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did--when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy.  

II Timothy 1:3-4

Paul wrote this letter to his friend and colleague in ministry Timothy. This letter is one of Paul’s most personal and pastoral. The introduction to this letter in the New Oxford Annotated New Revised Standard Version Bible gives us more detail about this letter and reminds us that much of our information about Timothy and Paul comes from the Acts of the Apostles. It is clear in the opening to the letter that Paul is missing Timothy. I resonate a bit with this letter, I too am missing my FCC friends and colleagues in ministry during this interlude with COVID-19. I am blessed to have the collegiality and friendship of the other staff members here at FCC, Mark Miller and Kelly Tyrrell, but I am missing everyone else. I feel a pang of sadness as I enter the church building. Mark, Kelly and I have been working hard to help us all feel connected to God and one another, but, it’s just not the same as leading worship in the sanctuary on Sunday mornings. I suspect many of you are feeling the same way. The self-isolation imposed by this pandemic has been a challenge for everyone, all around the world.

I suspect one of the greatest challenges facing us all is the sense of loss and grief. We are grieving a lot these days. Some of our grief is obvious; the deaths of two beloved church members, Gene Brockemeyer and Rose Dow, are painful for us all. However, the inability to gather, for their funerals and celebrations of life, makes these losses even more painful for everyone. We were able to have small graveside services for each of them, but the inability to gather as a faith community was painful for us all. Grief of this magnitude touches on the more pervasive sense of grief that is a part of life these days. Missing our usual activities and the inability to be with those we love, are tremendous losses. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross articulated the five stages of grief well: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance.

As we move through these days, weeks, and perhaps months of life with COVID-19, we will move through all five stages. Sadly, it is not an orderly process, we will move through the various stages at different times and at different paces. As Kenneth G. haugk points out in the first “Journey through Grief” booklet entitled “A Time to Grieve” there are three “N’s” of grief; it is normal, natural and necessary. Our Stephen Ministries program provides a set of these booklets to those who have experienced a loss (I got a set when my mom died last year). So, while it isn’t always pleasant, we can be assured that the myriad of feelings we are experiencing in these days are normal, natural and necessary. As we move throughout the five stages of grief may we be reminded that God is with us. Hauck opens the first booklet with this scripture:

Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am faint; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are in agony.
My soul is in anguish. How long, O Lord, how long?  

(Psalms 6:2-3 NIV)

May we experience God’s love and mercy during these uncertain times and may we be confident that God guides and journeys with us through all stages of grief.

In love and joy, Pastor Karen Moritz – Lincoln First Christian Church