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Dear Saints in Christ,

At the end of his ministry, Moses was not able to enter into the Promised Land with the people. So, he recalled for them the covenant that the Lord had made with them at Sinai – that he would be their God, and they would be his people. Moses warned them not to imitate the practices of the surrounding nations who worshipped other gods and committed terrible sin. He reminded them of the words the Lord spoke to them, the laws, instructions, commandments – and promises. With these promises, he assured the people, *Yahweh your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him* (Deuteronomy 18:14).

Unless our Lord, in his grace and mercy, returns in the next few weeks, I also will not be with you as you enter into the *real* Promised Land of rest in a new creation with Christ. Like Moses, I will be saddened to leave you. Unlike Moses, I am not a prophet. Even more, as Amos famously said, *I was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I was a shepherd...* (Amos 7:14). I am just a lowly shepherd, a pastor who was called to do nothing other than speak God's Word of Law and Gospel to you – to call you to repentance and to forgive the repentant – to love you as fellow workers in the truth (3 John 8), and to point you always to Jesus Christ in word and deed.

There is only one Good Shepherd, after all (John 10:11). *He* is the one who lays down his life for the sheep; who came that we may have life and have it abundantly; who knows his own and calls them to himself; who leads us through the valley of the shadow of death on paths of righteousness into green pastures and still waters; who prepares a table and makes our cup overflow; who dwells with us and restores our soul (Psalm 23).

Yes, another man will be called to serve this congregation. He, and not I, will be your pastor. Listen to him when he speaks to you God's Word. Repent when he calls out your sin. Rejoice when he speaks the sweet words of absolution over you. Receive the gifts of God for which he will be called to be a steward (1 Corinthians 4:1). Follow his example of godliness and contentment in faith and love. But, he, like I, will just be an under-shepherd. The Church is not about who the pastor is. *Jesus* will remain your one and only Good Shepherd. *Jesus* will remain your Lord and Savior. So, as our God and Father himself spoke to the chosen apostles, *Listen to him!* (Matthew 17:5), for Jesus and Jesus alone is your faith, your hope, your life, and your salvation.

Transitions are always difficult, and I know that this transition will be difficult for both of us. I and my family will miss you all terribly, and many of you have expressed the same toward us. I know also that a vacancy can bring a lot of uncertainty about the present and the future. But, even though I will no longer be with you in the flesh, I can leave you with the sweet promises of Jesus. *Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age* (Matthew 28:20). *Behold, I am making all things new* (Revelation 21:5). *Surely I am coming soon* (Revelation 22:20). Together with you, and with the whole Church, we pray, *Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!*

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you, now and always. Amen!

Yours Always in Christ,

Rev. Mark R. Squire, Pastor

yesterDAY *Today* forever

Hebrews 13:8