

*Turn again, O God of hosts, look down from heaven and see;*

*Have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand has planted.* -Psalm 80:14 (NRSV)

Give thanks, Zion: God is looking, God does see, God regards with great love this vine, for it is planted in God's grace through Jesus Christ.

Psalm 80 works with some of the dangers that can destroy a vine: vandalism, wild animals, fire, despite all the tender care that God might put into its life. It's a metaphor for the precarious political state and the hostile spiritual condition surrounding God's people Israel at that time—which the Psalm says is to be met by people of faith with repentance and hope rather than despair and fear. Hope in God's grace keeps building as the refrain is repeated in verses 3, 7 and 19: *"Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved."* The temptation we always face to join the world's despair is named, accepted, and confessed, always in that confident hope faith has that God's covenant promise, love, and grace, never cease. This is a good word for us in our situation, too, whether we struggle to find a faithful way through this pandemic or any other situation that shakes us.

We move easily from "the vine" to the grapes, and then to the juice and the wine and the cup of the new covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ. Plans are being made to offer no-contact communion on Thanksgiving Sunday, October 11, for any who wish to commune in person. Whether you decide to receive the common consecrated bread and wine in the gathered assembly that day, or decide to continue your eucharistic fast another week, or choose a spiritual communion joining the gathering on line at home, the selfsame God who is everywhere present by The Word speaks the same promise: *"I am looking, I do see, I regard with great love this vine."* Only may every decision we make together and individually around the Lord's Supper be guided by this one principle: communion is a means of grace for all who believe these words, *"given and shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins."*

Many people have been thinking for a long time about this First Communion—we thought hard about our communion service on March 15, and we have thought harder during the 29 Sundays between! As the Lutheran Confessions are quite insistent on communion for all in both elements, for this "first run" we are planning distribution at the head of the centre aisle rather than at the altar rail to minimize interaction and maximize mitigation for a no-contact communion during the pandemic. Look for communication from the Altar Guild detailing the procedure after they have had a practice session or two!

Individual communions have been one of my joys these past months. Sanitizing the communion set one day afterwards, I realized the consecrated wine and grape juice from March 15 was still in the fridge! It had become an unintended tabernacle all this time.... To prepare for the Altar Guild practice, I began the process of removing the dehydrated wine from the individual glasses and disposing of it on the ground around the old gnarled box elder behind the church. But no amount of soaking could remove the rosy tint that had transferred from the consecrated wine into the plastic... As they were placed together in the drip basket, a pattern formed, flower-like, almost a rose... Maybe communion does that to us, too. Maybe it leaves the rosy tint of the love of God in our lives, in our souls, for God to see, and all the world. Give thanks, Zion!