

## **Celebration Sunday Reflection by Judy Dixon**

Presented at Worship November 21, 2021

This morning, I'd like to talk to you a little bit about ...EXERCISE! Sound good? Well, maybe you'll be willing to work with me if I tell you that you can perform this exercise in the quiet stillness of your kitchen in the early morning or in a forest with the late afternoon sun streaming through the trees or in the catchy rhythms of a favorite song or in the brilliant colors of a painting. And you can exercise THIS even in the soft cradle of our old church pews. You won't have to move a muscle. Because I want to talk to you about exercising faith and, specifically, about how we all practiced that through this perhaps, unlikely, successful capital campaign.

This campaign called upon us to Have Faith in Our Future. Faith in Our FUTURE. And I found that having faith in our future when COVID had us anchored to the moment, tied to the NOW, meant uncovering or DIScovering true faith. This capital campaign meant that we as a church community had to believe in a future we could not quite envision and, I'm sure, more than a few of us on the campaign leadership team AND in our larger congregation doubted the wisdom of our timing. I know I did. How could we ask people to invest in a future largely centered on in-person gatherings—in our sanctuary, in our kitchen, and by extension in our vestry—when restaurants and theaters and, yes, faith communities across our country were engaged in a painful cycle of closing, sheltered reopening, and shuddering once again?

Last summer, when the behind the scenes work of the campaign began, many of us felt stalled out on "Corona Blvd." and we couldn't see ahead far enough to know where we were headed or even how rocky the road might become. There were, we

knew, dangers and casualties on that road. Many of us had suffered true losses, loved ones who succumbed to a virus that was both unpredictable and merciless, economic difficulties connected to shutdowns and quarantines, emotional stressors from isolation and dare-I-say-it-out-loud TOO MUCH together time. Vaccines inspired some optimism but questions remained: How would COVID end? When? And what would be forever changed about our patterns and routines? What would worshipful and celebratory gatherings look like in the future? Would people EVER again hold the large community meetings, lectures, and performances we hoped to welcome into our revitalized spaces? And in terms of campaign strategy, would people be willing to invest in this space with so much uncertainty around us? Some of us even pondered...Was it improper to ask?

Joining the campaign leadership team and actively engaging in advocacy around the projects we hope will renew life around here called upon me at the gut-level. Shortly after saying yes to co-chair communications with my partner in messaging, Jeff Clausen, I realized that our team had been called to believe in hope and actively practice resilience. We were summoned at a time of uncertainty to BE resilience. And we took it seriously. The Faith in Our Future campaign became more than a fundraiser. It became a faith-raiser of sorts, and we learned that having faith is an action. There is nothing passive about it. Have faith? OK... Keep the faith? SURE. How about EXERCISE faith? WOW. And so we actively mapped our way out of apathy and the threat of despair with purpose...

- RESTORE that steeple? Yes.
- RENEW our gathering spaces? Yes.

- RECLAIM our place and practice here? Yes.
- RE-ENGAGE with our world neighbors? Yes.
- YES! We would RECOMMIT—even if it felt like a leap of, well, FAITH!

Through this campaign, its odd timing, and what I'm sure will be its astounding success, God showed up once again to remind us that in adversity, there is always the opportunity to love each other and to grow. We just had to be brave and exercise-- exercise our FAITH in a bright future. Just look how much stronger we are now!