"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against things like this."
— Galatians 5:22-23

To my beloved East Cobb UMC family,

In just a few short weeks, we will reach the one year mark of experiencing life and church in a pandemic. For my family, it has been a year of ups and downs: enjoying the extra time spent together and desperately wanting our own space; grateful that I get to see my children’s education flourish in our dining room and saying numerous prayers for the teachers who continually say, “some of our friends are not on mute”; involving my children in recording videos for worship and angrily pressing pause on my sermon recording when they interrupt me yet again. We’ve experienced great joy over the past year but also great loss.

Just as it is with our families, so it is with the church. There have been great joys to celebrate, from successful mission projects with MUST Ministries and Powers Ferry Elementary to community conversations around race and mental health, from creative virtual and parking lot worship to our annual Christmas Concert that typically reaches a few hundred now having been viewed over 1000 times on Facebook. But, there have also been great losses. A year without Fat Boy ice cream sandwiches at Wednesday night dinners. A year without coffee in the Gathering Place. A year without smiles and laughter and hugs in the Narthex. A year without worshiping together in the Sanctuary.

I invite you to pause and take a deep breath:

   Breathe in the joys of the year.
   Breathe out and release what was lost.

It has been a difficult year, and yet the church remains. We may be a little battered and bruised, but we remain. As I contemplate that truth and wonder how we have done it, the words of Galatians resonate in my mind and in my heart.

   “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against things like this.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

Yes, the church remains, for our success is defined not by the fruits of the world but the fruits of the Spirit. We remain because East Cobb UMC is a place of love--Love for God, Love for
one another, Love for our neighbor, Love for the stranger.

We remain because East Cobb UMC is a place of joy—a joy that resides deep within, where God meets us, and exists no matter our circumstances.

We remain because East Cobb UMC is a place of peace. Even when frustrations bubble to the surface, we are able to see the Divine in one another and treat one another as such.

We remain because East Cobb UMC is a place of patience. We will be patient as we wait for the good and safe time to return to life post-pandemic, knowing that our patience derives from our desire to do no harm.

We remain because East Cobb UMC is a place of kindness and goodness, acknowledging that the church does not exist just for us but is meant to be a beacon of light, serving and sharing Jesus outside its walls.

We remain because East Cobb UMC is a place of faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. East Cobb UMC is a hub for the work of the Holy Spirit.

Thank you for being a people who embody these fruits of the Spirit!

I look forward to what opportunities this year will offer us, and I hope you will continue to be an active participant in the mission and ministry of our church wherever God leads. I am excited to announce that we will resume in-person, outdoor worship beginning Palm Sunday, March 28 at 11 a.m. We will continue weekly with the hopes that vaccinations will continue to increase and cases will continue to decrease, allowing us to move indoors shortly thereafter.¹

I am grateful to experience life with you all. Let us all continue to follow the Spirit!

Peace,

Rev. Kristin Heiden

¹ As of the writing of this letter, Cobb County remains in the orange zone for daily new cases, just slightly out of the red zone. The current ICU capacity in the county is at 95%, and only 14% of our county has received their first dose of the vaccine. Our regathering team agreed last year to follow the guidance from the annual conference which states that gatherings should not happen when the church falls in the red or orange zone and to take extreme caution when in the yellow zone.