

## Pastor's Letter – April, 2015

I am writing this essay with a pencil. Call it an act of subtle defiance in a world teeming with technology. Just this once, no clicking or tapping or swiping or sweeping. Just a primitive, yellow, hexagonal stick scraping graphite against a bare page. Though equipped to do so, I don't bother to erase when an errant word takes shape on the paper. I just cross it out and move on, leaving a glaring testimony to my mistake. In that sense, I find pencils to be more honest than computers, which have the option to "delete" the word and leave the reader with the impression that what was written flowed seamlessly from my frontal cortex, by way of the spinal column, to my left hand and out onto the page. No such pretense with a pencil.

If pencils are more honest than computers, they are more forgiving than pens, whose permanence brings a measure of anxiety: "one false move...and this note-card gets it!" –stained and unceremoniously tossed into the circular file due to an unpardonable and irreversible error of ink.

Yes, pencils are both honest and forgiving – like the best of friends. Pencils are like friends in one other way: they are noisy. Pencils scratch and scrape. (By contrast, pens and computers are relatively mute.) Friends speak up, question, and challenge AND affirm, celebrate, and encourage. Friends engage, chatter, banter and even badger.

The pencil has even more to teach us about ourselves! As I look back over this graphite-littered page, with all the cross-outs, arrows, additions and corrections, the inherent "unloveliness" of the creative process is evident. Unfortunately, the reader of this essay is not privy to the delicious messiness of the composing and de-composing that went into the finished product. Again, I suggest that pencil writing speaks to us of the human condition...

I've seen relationships that appear to be without blemish – relationships between people and relationships with God. I sometimes feel deficient when I see them, because I am much more like the graphite-smear page, full of obvious missteps, dead-ends, false starts, and second thoughts. And so I gravitate to those of the "graphite persuasion", those who - like me - are unmistakably smudged with the need for God's deep forgiveness – forgiveness of themselves and others. Figuratively speaking, I look for the graphite stain on another's pinky that tells me that they, too, engage in the messy process of writing their lives, while leaning heavily upon the grace of God.

We are told that God knows the hairs on our heads. (In my case, God doesn't even break a sweat on that one.) Point is, God knows us...knows us very well...with all our deletions and omissions, cross-outs and mess-ups - as individuals, as families, as a church, as a nation and a planet. Nothing is hidden. And nothing is lost. The very good news is that the Holy One keeps us amply supplied with graphite. There's only one thing we must not do: and that is to stop "writing". No matter what sort of mess we make – as individuals or as groups – we need to keep scratching away, sustained by the promise that out of the mess something good will emerge.

Even out of our most caustic, divisive debates about education, energy, jobs or defense, the true sin is not disagreement; it's disengagement. I believe we are compelled to keep on scratching – "getting the lead out", as we co-create with one another and with the God – the God of all messiness...as well as all beauty.

My pencil tells me I need to make my point while I still have one. So I sign off with gratitude for the chance to join you in scratching out our story, trusting in the Great Editor to make sense of it all...to make good of it all.

Your faithful scribe,  
Tim