

ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH

Princeton, MN

“Return to Zion”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Tuesday, June 8, 2021

The **Return to Zion** refers to the event in the Bible in which the Jews returned to the Land of Israel from the Babylonian exile following the decree by the emperor Cyrus the Great, the conqueror of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in 539 BCE, also known as Cyrus's Edict or Decree. The Neo-Babylonian Empire under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar II occupied the Kingdom of Judah between 597–586 BCE. The Babylonian army, under the command of Nebuzaradan, had destroyed the first temple in Jerusalem and then ordered the king of Judah, Zedekiah, to be exiled to Babylon along with most of the people of Israel. According to the books of Ezra–Nehemiah, a number of decades later in 538 BCE, the Jews in Babylon were allowed to return to the Land of Israel, due to Cyrus's Decree. The Decree of Cyrus allowed the deported Jews to return to their homeland after decades of exile and also ordered the Temple to be rebuilt in Jerusalem to restore worship for God's people. Initially, around 50,000 Jews returned to the land of Israel following the Decree of Cyrus as described in Ezra, whereas most remained in Babylon. Later, an unknown number of exiles returned from Babylon with Ezra himself. The return of the deportees to Judah during the next 110 years is known as the **Return to Zion**, an event by which Jews ever since have been inspired. God's people **Returned to Zion** with great joy!

My friends, our exile is over! We now **Return to Zion** with great joy! In a sense we have been in exile for over a year with all the restrictions of Covid-19. Now nearly all restrictions have been removed. The Lord's Supper is being served at the Communion Rail, there is no social distancing, the Hymnals are back in the pews and singing is increasing. Masks are optional; however, we request that if you are not fully vaccinated that you continue to wear a mask (per CDC guidelines). At the Council Meeting last night, it was decided to keep the Worship and Bible Study time the same for the summer, so Worship will remain at 10:00 am, with Adult Bible Class at 9:00 am. We will be reinstating Greeters in July and we ask that you hand out Worship folders and bulletins in the back of the sanctuary, not in the Fellowship Hall. We are having Vacation Bible School again this year on Sunday-Thursday, July 25-29 in the evening. If you would like to help, please let myself or one of the Council members know. We will have Outdoor Worship Services the last Sunday of the months of June (27th), July (25th), and August (29th). If the weather is too hot or too cold or raining, worship will be in the Sanctuary. We will also be having **served meals** after each Outdoor Service. We will have our Quarterly Voter's Meeting on Sunday, July 11th right after Worship. Things are **Returning** back to normal at **Zion – PRAISE GOD!**

Return to Zion! We have been away over this past year, not due to our own sin, but because of the result of sin in the world. Our desire has been to be in God's house, **Zion** and we now have **Returned to Zion!**

Returning to God, however is not just a Sunday event, but ought to be a daily habit. Luther states that our life as a Christian ought to be one of daily repentance, which means that every day we should **Return to God**. In sin, our own sin, we are living a life of walking away from God and His will. By repentance, we stop our sinful ways, turn around and **Return to the Lord**, seeking His forgiveness. And the Good News is that God always receives us with open, loving and forgiving arms. He says, “Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest... for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:28-29). The reason Jesus came, suffered and died for our sins and rose again on the third day was to give us rest, rest for our souls while we are here on earth and rest forever in heaven when we will truly **Return to God**.

In Christ, Pastor Tischer

- Some information in this letter selected from WIKIPEDIA (Return to Zion).