

An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for October 20, 2021

Hello Everyone – I know it's been a couple of weeks. I wasn't well last week but fortunately it wasn't Covid. But I'm back and very much educated on what to do and what not to do about getting a Covid test.

Since the retailers around us seem to be putting out Christmas items, even before Halloween, let me include this promotion for a possible Christmas gift. We have lots of cookbooks for sale! **THE AMAZING PUBLICATION – LOAVES & FISHES & UNITED METHODIST DISHES – Is once again on sale in our church office for the AMAZING PRICE OF \$20.00.** This classic publication includes the tasty and mouthwatering recipes of some of your favorite Mount Carmel cooks. It even includes my own Chili recipe which was previously marketed as Pastor Mikes Hotter Than Hell Chili but renamed for propriety's sake. These make wonderful Christmas gifts for family, friends, co-workers, and even random strangers if you're so inclined. Buy a few of these timeless classics to save away for future generations! Hurry while supplies last! Proceeds will go to our general expense fund. There will also be a few on hand for sale on Sunday mornings.

Here are some announcements worthy of repeating.

"The Outreach Committee met several weeks ago to finalize opportunities for the upcoming holiday season. On October 17th we will start collecting certain canned goods for the Thanksgiving bags for our friends at the Soup Kitchen. Each bag should contain: a box of instant mashed potatoes, a can of cranberries, a box of stuffing mix, a can of sweet potatoes or yams, a can or jar of turkey gravy and a can of vegetables of your choice. If you want to help with this project, please bring some or all of the above items to the narthex starting October 17th. We will be handing out the "Fixing Bags" up until the Monday before Thanksgiving. Our church has been helping with this local project for many years. Last year we helped supply Thanksgiving dinner to 63 families

Watch this space for additional opportunities to help others throughout the holidays.

Thanks, Outreach Committee"

We are preparing for our celebration of **All Saints Sunday on November 7th**. If you have lost someone dear to you over the past year and would like them remembered during the worship service that day please contact the church office with details. We would also like to share a picture which you can forward to the church as well. Then please plan to be present when that person is remembered.

Signing On For Zoom Worship Services. As most of you who Zoom our worship services know, I greet Zoom attendees as they sign on, take Zoom attendance, and assign names to phone numbers as phone callers sign on. I open the Zoom meeting at 9 a.m. in order to give people time to sign on. If you are Zooming, I encourage you to sign on early to avoid the crush of people signing on at the last minute. At 9:30 I have to make a mad dash from the office to the sanctuary to lead the service. The earlier you sign on the easier it is for me to attend to the greeting responsibilities. It also gives us a chance to chat, and share prayer requests

In person worship is open to everyone. We are not requiring the wearing of masks in the sanctuary but asking that you space yourselves appropriately. If you are not vaccinated, are otherwise at risk, or simply uncomfortable going maskless we strongly suggest that you wear your mask. It goes without saying that if you are sick stay home! You can always enjoy our worship service via Zoom. We do have a fellowship time in the breezeway following our worship service.

Thank you to everyone who has been diligently supporting our ministry with your tithes and offerings. Your contributions have kept us open and in ministry through a very difficult period. Your faithfulness in supporting our church with your prayers, presence, gifts, and service has made all the difference!

An Encouraging Word

Perhaps my second favorite holiday is Halloween. Christmas will always be first of course, but Halloween is second and it's closely tied with Thanksgiving. It may sound strange to hear a clergy person saying this but there it is. Yes, Easter is important for all of it's theological importance but practically speaking when I see Easter on the calendar the first feeling that overtakes me is one of exhaustion. Christmas also leaves me exhausted but not to such a great extent. Halloween

simply happens, I don't have to do anything except watch my favorite Science Fiction and Horror Movies and eat candy. In fact, I begin celebrating Halloween on October 1st.

One of the reasons I like Halloween so much is the childhood memories it brings back of Halloween parties my mother would arrange for us kids and our friends. I also remember making paper mache' Halloween masks and wearing them for trick-or-treating. I remember going door to door collecting candy on a cold and crisp evening; finally ending up at my grandparent's house to count the loot and drink hot cider. It was also an evening that stirred my imagination concerning mysterious things "that go bump in the night" and primed my mind to consider the idea of forces moving in our world and universe that we can't fully perceive or understand. In this way it helped prepare me to consider the possibility of God – an unseen force moving about in the world. Yes, that's a bit of a backdoor way into faith – but it certainly didn't hurt.

It is not by accident that Halloween, or All Hallows Eve, and its revelry is followed by All Saints Day. What we now call Halloween began as the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain. It marked the end of Summer and the beginning of Winter, a season that at the time was associated with death. In the transition between the season of life, and the season of death and decay, was the night of Samhain - a time when the boundaries between life and death were blurred and spirits could come back from the dead. Samhain was the sober recognition that death follows life and that all living things are mortal. It also acknowledged a spiritual reality beyond this one.

Then the Romans began to move into those territories occupied by the Celts and brought with them similar celebrations. One of these was Feralia which was observed late in October and commemorated the passing of the dead. Its celebration merged with the traditions of Samhain. Please note that once again here the theme is mortality. Then on May 13, 609 A.D. Pope Boniface IV dedicated the Pantheon in Rome to honor all Christian martyrs. This established for the western church the feast day of All Martyrs. Then Pope Gregory expanded the festival to include all saints and martyrs and moved it's observance to November 1st – the day immediately following the Celtic celebration of Samhain. This was most likely a deliberate and successful attempt to eclipse what was considered a pagan festival recognizing mortality with a festival asserting the Christian message of resurrection and everlasting life.

What we end up with is a mini-Lent/Easter cycle. Lent, which begins forty days before the celebration of Easter, is all about human mortality and brokenness. It begins with the pronouncement on Ash Wednesday, "remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return". This time of sober reflection on our imperfection and mortality ends with the Easter morning pronouncement of resurrection and everlasting life. We see this same pattern in miniature in the relationship between Samhain-Halloween and All Saints Day. The one recognizes human mortality and the existence of evil in our world which is then eclipsed by a celebration of God's answer to the existence of evil in the redeeming work of the saints who now reside in everlasting light.

The message is the same. Life follows death. Human imperfection is redeemed to everlasting life. The existence of evil in our world is always countered by the work of the saints. This is truly an encouraging word as we struggle with the grim reality of the Coronavirus and its negative effects on our society and everyday life. Yes, it is a terrible reminder of human mortality. But it is always countered with the light of God's in-breaking Kingdom. Spring and Summer always follow winter. Easter and resurrection always follow our confrontation with human sin and mortality. The mortal and evil side of human nature is always countered by all the saints, those living among us and those now in the place of eternal light.

That's all for today. I'll see you all virtually or in person on Sunday. Until then be well, stay safe, make good decisions in this Coronavirus environment, and please stay connected to each other and to God. Blessings & Peace, Mike