

An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for October 2nd , 2021

Hello Everyone – I pray that your week has been filled with blessings. As many of you know we had our Church Conference last Sunday afternoon. That went very well though there are some loose ends that need tying up. We will need to find someone to serve as trustee chair for at least one year and vote them into that position through special charge conference action. Please be in prayer that we are able to find that person or that someone is moved to step forward. This is a critical need. Everything else went off without a hitch.

Laity Sunday takes place on October 17th. The focus for Laity Sunday is the ministry of the Laity. This means the focus is on you, the people in the pews. If you have a brief testimony you would like to share or a story of how God has been blessing you or leading you through life Laity Sunday is your opportunity to share it. We really want to hear from you! Please let us know if you would like to participate in the service that Sunday in sharing your story. Call the church office or letting us know via email.

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.

There is a Trustees meeting scheduled for this coming Monday, October 4th, at 6:30 p.m. If you are on the Board of Trustees Phil will follow up with details.

This coming Sunday is World Communion Sunday. Pre-packaged, self-contained, communion elements are available in the church Narthex for those who wish to receive communion at home on Sunday morning as it is celebrated here. **Please note that the envelopes for the special world communion offering were made available at the worship service last Sunday. If you wish to participate in the special offering, you may bring your offering in one of those envelopes this Sunday. The World Communion Special Offering benefits World Communion International Scholarships, Ethnic Scholarships, and Ethnic In-Service-Training.**

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

The Announcements and Bulletin for Sunday's service are included as attachments to this encouraging word. Please feel free to print them out and either bring them with you to the service or to use them as your guide as you Zoom the service. For those attending in person the worship order is provided on the monitors.

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!

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An Encouraging Word

To say that these last eighteen months have been a little stressful would be a huge understatement. Right now, many of us are truly stressed out. I can see it in people's manner, hear it in their speaking, and see it in their bleary eyes which haven't had a lot of sleep. We had hoped when all this started that the Coronavirus would be behind us by now. Clearly that is not the case. So, the stressfulness of the situation continues. We are all, to one extent or another, on edge and that's a dangerous place to be especially when it comes to communicating, listening, and responding to others. It's way too easy in these days of stress to go off "halfcocked" responding to others without having really heard them.

We need to guard against going off halfcocked. What does that mean? Before the days of firearms with pre-loaded cartridge's firearms were of the flintlock variety. Flintlock firearms have a "cock" or striker mechanism containing flint, which is held in a raised or sprung position ready to release and strike a piece of steel making a spark, which then ignited gunpowder in a "pan" which in turn ignited a main charge that fired the gun. These weapons could be set at half-cock or a "safe" state or full cock in readiness to be fired. A gun could only go off at half-cock by mistake. We now use the term to describe the act of speaking or acting impulsively and without preparation.

There's another saying that I picked up somewhere that declares. "put your brain in gear before engaging your mouth." In other words, think before you speak. These days it seems that all too often the tendency is to speak first then think about it later. Any way we say it we're talking about miscommunication. There's far too much of that going on

in the world right now. I'm guilty of it myself. When we do that, we place ourselves on the doorstep of misunderstanding at best or, in worst cases, needless arguing and anger.

Proverbs 18:13 gives some very clear advice on this. "If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame." Jesus' younger brother James weighs in on this in the first chapter, 19th verse of his epistle. "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." Clearly part of responsibility as disciples of Jesus is to communicate well with an abundance of listening and forethought. Otherwise, we can easily become part of the angry background noise of the world.

As I read through the Gospels, I witness Jesus listening empathetically to the people around him. He asked questions of them to better understand their need – where they were in life. He listened attentively in all his conversations, not dismissively or with half an ear. He entered each conversation without bias or judgement. We would do well to learn from his example.

Perhaps the hardest thing to do is to first listen without bias or judgement. Our biases and our judgementalism can distort what we are hearing someone say to us, it can cause us to discount what they are saying altogether and cause us to respond in inappropriate ways. Our biases are a part of who we are, we can't simply shut them off, but we do need to be aware of them and the way they color what we hear – or for that matter what we read. If we don't bother to account for our own biases as we listen to others, we may easily go off half-cocked and make matters worse.

Before we respond to others we need to listen with an empathetic ear. That is, we need to try to understand where they are coming from and put ourselves in their shoes. That simple shift in perspective can open a whole new vista of understanding and prepare us to respond in helpful and constructive ways. We should not be afraid of asking questions for clarification if we're not sure of what we are hearing. Even if we are sure of what we are hearing we need to restate it or paraphrase it back just to be sure.

All of this is pretty simple. It's "Listening to Speak 101" course material. Yet these days it seems that there is too little listening going on and too much talking without thinking. It just adds to the confusing tower of babble that we seem to be erecting in our nation and world – and we know what happened to the first tower of babble. It wasn't pretty. If you are not already doing so, I want to encourage you to put some of what I've mentioned into practice. Remember we have a wonderful truth to share, but we can't share it very well through clouds of misunderstanding. There is a lot of healing to be done in our community, nation, and world. There are many relationships that need mending and walls of misunderstanding that need to be taken down. That's the kind of ministry Jesus was engaged in, it is the kind of ministry we are called to be engaged in as well

That's all for today. I'll see you tomorrow either in the Zoom virtual worship room, or in person at our worship service. Until then be well, stay safe, make good decisions in this Coronavirus environment, and in please stay connected to each other and to God.

Blessings & Peace, Mike