

An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for November 20th, 2021

Hello Everyone – As we approach the holiday season and the time for family celebrations I encourage you to be safe and stay smart. As most gatherings will be inside, please remember that enclosed and crowded spaces are likely places for the Coronavirus to spread. Take whatever precautions you deem prudent. The virus is still out there and expected to surge somewhat during the holiday season. If you are symptomatic, coughing and sneezing, or feel like you're coming down with something please consider staying home and by all means avoid attending church and other large gatherings in person. There are some among us who are unvaccinated or immunocompromised and we need to be considerate of them. We will continue Zooming our services to everyone who cannot attend in person

Here's some information the Faith – Hope Circle would like shared.

Usually, we have a Christmas luncheon and invite the congregation, but since the prices are significantly higher and places are not open for lunch, we will not be able to do that.

At our December 2nd meeting, we will be collecting items for presents for the residents at the Glen Burnie Rehab Center. The items typically include hygiene products and crossword puzzles. We also sign and present Christmas cards. We will also be preparing gifts of cookies to shut-ins of the church.

In January, we will donate \$100 to the Child Development Center.

The Circle also works to provide a funeral luncheon for members, when needed.

Membership is open to all women of the church and monthly dues are \$10.00. We welcome all women into the Circle.

Christmas 2021 Memorials – Would you like to remember or honor a loved one this Christmas? You may do so by purchasing a poinsettia to decorate the church; or, instead, you may prefer to donate to the general fund or to the trustees' fund. To honor or remember family members or friends, please complete the form attached to this email and return it to the church. (forms can also be picked up at the church as well)

The deadline is November 28.

Mt. Carmel Child Development Center Fundraiser – The CDC is having a **Scentsy!** fundraiser to raise funds for the playground. You can find the form attached to this email. Their wickless candles make wonderful, affordable Christmas gifts and 20% goes back to the CDC! **All orders must be placed by November 29.**

Here are some announcements worthy of repeating.

An important reminder to members and friends who enter the building – through either entrance – **while the Child Development Center is open and operating: Please**

be sure you are masked – even if you are just going to the office or sanctuary. This is critically important for keeping our unvaccinated children safe and for setting a tone of caution for those using our facility.

If you have prayer requests, even if you plan to share them at Sunday worship, you may forward them ahead of time to Jen at the church office and she will compile a list to be used on Sunday morning. This will be a great help to this hearing-impaired pastor who can't always hear the prayer request correctly when shared during worship.

The Outreach Committee would like to spread the word about upcoming opportunities to help others during this holiday season:

- We are pleased to report that volunteers have come forward to help the 5 families we are taking for Thanksgiving and Christmas for the Holiday Sharing program. We are providing food for a Thanksgiving meal and food for a Christmas meal plus providing gifts for the children of those families. Thank you to everyone who volunteered for this project. We have been participating in the Holiday Sharing program for many years, even through last year's pandemic.

- We want to thank everyone who participated in the Thanksgiving Fixing Bag program for our friends at the Pasadena Soup Kitchen. The Maryland Food Bank is providing the turkeys and our church members and friends provided the remainder of the groceries needed for the meal. As of this date we have giving out over 35 Thanksgiving bags and there are two more weeks to go.

- We are about to start our annual Sock and Mitten Tree project for the children in our local homeless camps for Christmas. We partner with the Child Development Center every year to hang new socks, mittens, gloves, scarves and hats on the Christmas tree located in the church hall. We are adding adult socks to the list this year. We have been told that the adults in the homeless camps really need socks in the winter. The tree is not up yet, but we need to gather all our donated items by December 12th. Please keep this need in mind while you are doing your shopping.

- Our annual Cookie Bake/bring for the homeless has been moved to Valentine's Day. It seems many churches and organizations are donating cookies this year. The organizers have asked us to provide cookies for that mid-winter holiday. Well, is it ever a bad time for a cookie?

Thanks again for all of the support our church gives for these holiday programs. It is much appreciated every year.

Thanks, The Outreach Committee

There are several bible studies that I would like to announce. The first is an Advent Study which began this past Wednesday. This study will last 4 to 5 weeks and will

conclude mid-December. It's entitled "Faithful: Christmas Through the Eyes of Joseph" by Adam Hamilton. The student book is available as paperback, hardcover, or Kindle through Amazon or Cokesbury. You are still welcome to join us.

The next bible study will begin in January, also by Adam Hamilton it is entitled Words of Life and is a ten weeklong study on the Ten Commandments. It is also available from Amazon and Cokesbury. Both will be Zoom classes since that format seems to work very well for most of us. I have sent the Zoom invitations to the list compiled from past bible study participants. If you would like to be included on this list please let me know or notify the Church Office.

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 proprieties 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.

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!

An Encouraging Word

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

With these words Jesus opened his public ministry. He was quoting Isaiah 61: 1 – 2 and with these words he proclaims his (and God's) vision for the future of humanity. From this point and onward through his ministry Jesus would double down on this vision, expand upon it, and work toward it. This vision is not one of the "sweet by and by" unobtainable in the real world and only to be realized in God's heavenly one. This is a practical vision for the here and now, a vision Jesus fully intends to claim and achieve for all humanity.

The vision for humanity that Jesus declared in his teaching throughout his ministry wasn't intended as a pipe dream. But for it to become more than a dream, action and sacrifice would be required. It would take courage to step up and work toward the fulfillment of this vision; courage on Jesus' part as well as for an ever-expanding circle of disciples moving forward. Visions and dreams remain visions and dreams unless someone acts on them and acting on them requires courage.

A recent movie which I thoroughly enjoyed illustrates this idea that making dreams come true requires courage. In "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" the principal character Walter Mitty daydreams a lot. He imagines himself in all sorts of heroic roles and circumstances. In his imaginary world he is amazing and adventurous. In the real world he is going nowhere. Then circumstances arise which invite him to move out of the safe confines of his imagination into a real-world adventure. Each step requires a more courageous act. It takes courage to get on a helicopter with a drunk pilot, it takes even more courage to jump out of the helicopter into a storm-tossed sea, and yet greater courage to trek alone into the ungoverned region of Afghanistan. In the end Walter becomes the daring and adventurous person he had only imagined himself to be. To get there and make his dream reality took courage.

The vision for humankind that drove Jesus' ministry remains as our vision for humanity today. It is a vision of love and compassion overcoming fear and hate. It is a vision of

justice and peace for all God's people. Yet it remains a vision that requires courageous people to step forward to pursue and claim it. It requires courageous words of love spoken into a world more motivated by hate. It requires courageous acts of love and compassion performed against attitudes of indifference, fear, and hostility. It requires us to stop dreaming of that future for humanity and start acting upon it.

Our world needs this vision of hope, justice, love, and compassion now more than ever. It also needs we who claim Christ, who have been entrusted with this vision for the future of humanity, to step forward with courage and make it real. Make it happen. The courage we need to accomplish this comes from Christ Jesus who courageously endured all things, even the cross, for our sakes.

The indifference, fear, and hostility, the injustice and suffering, the captivity and oppression Jesus denounced as he proclaimed his vision and purpose are all the things of death. Where can we find the courage to stand against them? Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians declares the source of our courage. *"But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, stand firm, Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know your labor in the Lord is not in vain."* 1 Corinthians 15: 57 – 58. Psalm 124:8 declares, "Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth." Jesus is the source of our strength and our courage. Leaning on him, we can accomplish anything even in the most hostile of circumstances!

These days we are filled with all sorts of fears for our future. It seems the visions and dreams we have for our future in this world are assaulted every day. Yet our dreams persist; dreams of a world that's more compassionate, just, inclusive, and peaceful. These dreams for the future are all contained in the vision that Jesus declared for us and it remains valid and possible. All it needs are courageous heroes to step forward, take up the vision, claim it, and act upon it making it real.

If you're wondering where that hero may be – just look in the mirror. That may seem a sobering word, but I find it encouraging. We have a vital and precious vision for our future placed in our care by our Lord. He empowers, encourages, and strengthens us each day to act on it and make it happen. As we engage each day with courageous and loving acts, both small and large, we are building toward that future Jesus envisioned for us long ago: a future of peace, love, prosperity, justice, and hope for all. It is within our power to make it so.

That's all for today. I'll see you Sunday either in person or on Zoom. 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