

An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for December 18th, 2021

Hello Everyone – This will probably be the last Encouraging Word that you'll receive from me for a couple of weeks. Next week is kind of busy for all of us, and downright hectic for me, so I'm not sure I'll be able to get one out. Then I'll be taking a break for about a week. Never fear, the Encouraging Word will be back on January 8th, 2022!

Merry Christmas from the Outreach Committee. We thank everyone for their continued support for all of our holiday projects. It is just amazing what this little church on the hill can provide. Because of you, we were able to provide 63 Thanksgiving fixing bags for the clients of the Pasadena Soup Kitchen. You provided Thanksgiving and Christmas meals for 5 local families and presents for their children through the Holiday Sharing program with the county. And with the help of the Child Development Center, provided 184 children's items including socks, gloves, and hats along with 212 adult items for the local homeless camps. Thank you all for your help. We hope everyone has a Merry Christmas and Happy and healthy New Year.

Here's an encouraging bit from Pam Mertz. During September and October 17 face masks were sewn and donated to friends, family, and healthcare workers. Also, seven rabbits and one heart were sold. This all earned a total of \$35 for the general fund. Thank you for your continued support.

Giving envelopes for 2021 are now available in the church narthex (sanctuary entry area). They are in alphabetical order. If you were expecting to get one but can't find yours please contact Jennifer in the Church office. Please also consider giving through our e-giving program, Jennifer can help set you up with that.

Our Celebrations on Christmas Eve this year begin with a brief service tailored to children and families with children. That celebration will begin at 6:30 p.m. Then, at 7 p.m. we will transition into our traditional Christmas Eve Communion Service and will provide overflow space, less conducive to virus sharing, in the Church Hall for those who are uncomfortable sitting with the larger group in the sanctuary. Communion will be provided in both areas. Special sacred music that was planned to follow the worship service will now be included within the service.

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.

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.**

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

"In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." *Matthew 5:16*

We have an assortment of bird feeders containing several varieties of bird seed that we have placed just outside our front window. We've also hung several suet cages alongside them. After the first frost I clean them and fill them. Then, after several days we are rewarded with the arrival of various species of birds taking advantage of our seed offerings. We've tried to provide seed in the feeders throughout the year, but when the days are warm, and there's plenty natural food to eat the seed we provide isn't consumed and it eventually rots. So, we wait until we know the birds need it.

As a result, the drab colors that normally fill our front window during the dead of winter are often adorned with momentary flashes of color. When it's been snowing the color provided by the birds flocking to our feeders is even more dazzling. We see flashes of red with the visits from cardinals and woodpeckers. We see flickers of blue as Blue Jays and the occasional Tufted Titmouse drop by. Even the striking grey and black of Carolina Chickadees darting from feeder to feeder bring life to an otherwise dead winter scene. I've even spotted some yellow from time to time, I'm just not sure what they are.

This spectacle of color just outside my window is a reminder to me that even in the cold days of winter, when the world seems grey and lifeless, that there is abundant and beautiful life all around. As I'm entertained by their activities amongst the feeders and their back and forth to nearby branches, I feel joy and find moments of peace in an often-hectic schedule. The birds are

reminders to me of abundant life, God's provision, and the beauty of God's creation. In a way they draw me closer to God.

The birds are also a reminder of what I'm called to be as a follower of Christ. As baptized Christians we are called to be reminders of God's grace and love especially in the cold and grey times when others only feel an absence of hope, love, or even life. Like the birds are always present (even though we may not notice them) we are called to be active and present in the lives of others all the time. Normally when life is bright and joyful our presence may not be as apparent and our ministry not seem as important. But when the grey, cold, and darker times overtake the lives of individuals, or communities, that's when we are called to be most obvious. That's when our colors really shine. We are the reminders of God's love and grace especially in dark times when beauty or joy seem to have left the world. In our ministry others can see flashes of God's love, sparkles of grace, and blazes of hope.

I encourage you to look for ways of spreading joy and hope in this world where some find it hard to find any. Be reminders to them of God's love and grace. May your presence in their lives give them glimpses of hope, especially if they are struggling in seemingly hopeless situations. Be encouraged yourselves! Grey, difficult, and dark days overtake us all. When that happens to you know that you are part of a community of love, joy, and grace, a flock of many joyous colors each one reminders of God's love.

That's all for today. I'll see you on 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