

An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for December 4th, 2021

Hello Everyone - As you may have noticed cold weather tends to be rough on hardware. Automobile batteries that are older and perhaps a little "iffy" give up the ghost. Plumbing weaknesses come out of the woodwork, literally. Evidence of neglected maintenance can be found everywhere. Winter is rough on people as well. Not only do we have to contend with the normal colds and flu, but we also have to deal with the Coronavirus as well. The cold makes our bones ache and our skin dry and itchy. All this means that we have to take extra care in this winter season.

Spiritually speaking we have winter seasons as well, times of stress and difficulty that take advantage of our lack of spiritual maintenance. These seasons will come and go but we all have them and for some of us it's a regular occurrence – as dependable as the turning of the seasons. Advent can be a time of spiritual maintenance, a time to attend to the maintenance of our spirits. Having done this, we can be ready for whatever spiritual winters come our way. I encourage you to take every opportunity that comes your way to engage in worship, bible study, prayer and meditation. Doing so will prevent our spiritual battery from dying.

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 in the Church Hall for those who are uncomfortable sitting with the larger group in the sanctuary. Communion will be provided in both areas.

Following the worship service, a presentation of sacred music will take place in the sanctuary and refreshments will be available in the church hall.

ANNOUNCEMENTS THAT NEED REPEATING

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 NEW deadline is December 8.**

Pasadena Area Congregations are invited to attend a Community Celebration of Christmas on December 5th, 2021 at 3 p.m. at Kurtz's Beach. It will be a one-hour service followed by refreshments. This is being arranged by Milt Zahn who is a clergy member of the Pasadena Area Ministerium. If you are able please bring a non-perishable food item for those in need which will be distributed through the Caring Cupboard.

The Outreach Committee sends the following announcement.

"The Outreach Committee sends a big thank you to everyone who participated in our Holiday programs. Because of your help, we handed out 64 Thanksgiving bags to our friends at the Pasadena Soup Kitchen.

We had enough people sign up for the county's Holiday Sharing program that 5 families in our area will have great Thanksgiving and Christmas meals along with presents for the children at Christmas. Thank you for all that help.

Our last project for Christmas is the Sock and Mitten collection for children in the local homeless camps. We have also been asked to add adult socks to our list this year. Please think about this project when

you are shopping. We only have a few weeks for this project. We need to have all items collected by December 12th so they can be handed out by Christmas.

The Outreach Committee is truly grateful for your continued help and support during this season of giving. " Thanks, Deb

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.

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 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 word "icon" is most used today to mean a graphic representation on a computer screen or tablet which denotes a selection or command. There was a time, however, when the word was commonly used to describe something that was far more precious and meaningful. Icons were once, and continue to be, windows through which one can glimpse Heaven. Greek icons, for instance, focused on intangible things and spiritual values. Icons represented Christian teachings at a time when most of the population was illiterate and so was the principle means of Christian education. In some situations, it was thought that they put the viewer in direct contact with the Holy and so were transformative. Show me a picture on a computer screen that can do that!

During the seasons of Advent and Christmas we are surrounded by icons! We are surrounded by visual representations that put us in touch with holiness. For instance, I love to sit in my living room gazing at our Christmas tree decorated with colorful lights and ornaments. Many of those ornaments are icons in themselves each of which have special meaning to me. As I gaze at the tree with all the other lights in the room turned off I see, not just a Christmas Tree, but a representation of Revelation 21:2, "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." There are times when I also see it as a visual representation of Augustine's "City of God".

If I shift my gaze slightly to the painting over our fireplace, I see another icon reminding me of the love of Jesus. The painting is entitled "Madonna and Child with Two Angels" by the fifteenth century Florentine painter Fra Filippo Lippi. In the painting the child is reaching out to comfort Mary, but also seems to be reaching out to comfort me as though to tell me everything will be alright. As I look at that painting, I feel comforted. It is a representation of holiness that I find transformative.

On the mantle there is a collection of beautifully decorated angels. They remind me not only of the angelic announcements to Mary and to the shepherds, but also that I am surrounded by angels and messengers of God's love each day. The poinsettia on the stand next to the fireplace traditionally

represents the beauty of the Virgin Mary. In various other cultures it represents purity and immortality. For some the red bracts are reminders of the blood of Christ. To me it's a reminder of abundant and beautiful life miraculously present in the dead of Winter – a reminder to me of the abundant life found in Christ. Even the representations of Santa Claus we see everywhere in this season are icons of charity, good will, joy, beneficence, and love; all characteristics seen in Jesus.

During this season we surround ourselves with icons, representations, and reminders of God's grace. In fact, everywhere we look, if we bother to really look, we will find ourselves surrounded by icons – symbols that guide our thoughts toward God. Of course, they are very apparent this time of year in the symbols of Christmas with which we surround ourselves. I see them everywhere I look in every season of the year. Nature provides abundant examples; butterflies, flower petals, and rainbows to name a few of the more obvious. But they can also be found among the knickknacks scattered around our homes; children's handmade gifts that express love like nothing else can or some memento of an unforgettable day at the beach with loved ones long gone. We are all surrounded by icons and reminders of grace.

Now here is the most encouraging, and perhaps surprising, word I have for you today. You are an icon! You are a God formed image and reminder in the lives of others of God's love! At least that is what we are called to be. Each of us is God's gift to the world. Each of us is God's gift to life. God's love has been poured into us – to be poured out from us into the lives of everyone around us. We are each made in the image of God. Search for reminders of God's love in the faces that surround you each day. And may they see that same love reflected in yours.

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