

An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for January 8th, 2022

Hello Everyone! I hope everyone enjoyed the snow. I know shoveling is a drag but the snow sure is beautiful. Walking around in it made me feel like a kid again.

Well, here we are in a new year that's starting to look suspiciously like last year. . . and most of the year before. We're finding that adaptation has become the rule. As the Coronavirus survives through adaptation, so must we. Even though these adaptations are inconvenient, difficult, and often a real drag some are necessary if we truly care for one-another. In some ways the Coronavirus forces us to be our brother's keeper. That's one of the adaptations I'm talking about. Being independence minded, we're not always that concerned with being our brother's keeper or being responsible for the safety of people we don't even know. But the Coronavirus has made it essential, and where this is not happening – that's where the Coronavirus flourishes.

One adaptation we must once again make, if only temporarily, **is returning to Zoom only worship** and avoiding gathering people in our sanctuary. The current infection rate makes this necessary and prudent as part of our responsibility to the wider community. I know that most, though not all of us, are vaccinated. But we can still get the virus and we can still spread it – possibly to those who are very much at risk. This Omicron version is much more contagious and can be deadly for some people. Members of the Reentering Well Task force met this last Monday evening and decided that we would celebrate Zoom only worship on January 9th, and 16th. We were in agreement that going to Zoom worship is the right thing to do at this time. We also need to keep in mind that right now an indoor mask mandate is in force and if we were to gather we would need to observe that. We also need to be aware that there are quite a few church members who have, at this, time been in close contact with someone who has tested positive and so would have to quarantine for ten days. These factors also contributed to our decision.

We will re-evaluate in two weeks looking at the infection rate and other metrics and decide what to do going forward from that point. It is very probable that we will be doing this only for a short period of time – until the present surge diminishes. **So please remember that for the next two Sundays we will not be meeting for worship in the sanctuary. Worship will take place on Zoom.**

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.

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.

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. **I encourage you to sign on early to avoid the crush of people signing on at the last minute.** 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 to use them as your guide as you Zoom the service.

A Word About Giving. As we begin a new year, we face several challenges as a congregation. One of those challenges is financial. Your faithfulness and diligence in giving helped us weather many of those challenges and for that I and the leadership team thank you. We were fortunate to have received several large memorials that allowed us to break even for the year. However, last year we also had federal help, and assistance from our annual conference, which we will not receive this year. This presents yet another challenge – to meet the financial obligations of our congregation while supporting the mission and ministry needs of our community. Our greatest and perhaps only means of support in meeting this challenge in this coming year will be through your prayerful and faithful giving. You can help in several ways. First by prayerfully considering increasing your weekly or monthly offering. Secondly by enrolling in our E-giving program. However you choose to support this ministry know that it is deeply appreciated and will enable our continued ministry presence in this community.

End of Year Giving Statements - Once again, to save paper and postage, the church will not be doing widespread printing up and distributing annual giving statements. Everyone can now easily generate their own statements from their Realm account whenever they like. If you do require a hard copy done the traditional way, please just let the office know and we can provide one. If you haven't accessed Realm and need a new invite sent, just let the office know. You can also see all your current giving and

history all the way back to 2008. Below are easy step by step instructions to print your giving statements.

Accessing Giving Record & End of Year Giving Statements

To generate and print out giving statements from your Realm account-

- Log into Realm
- Click on "Giving" on the left side of the page. It will automatically show your gifts for *this* year, to date, to verify your gifts.
- For Yearly Statements, click the Filter button (that droopy triangle symbol) and change the Gift Date Range to "Last Year". then click the blue "Filter" button.
- To print, simply click the Printer Icon. A report will generate, and you can click the Printer Icon in that window to print your statement.
- Done! 😊

Respectfully,
The Church Office & Finance Committee

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An Encouraging Word

"It is absolutely clear that God has called you to a free life. Just make sure that you don't use this freedom as an excuse to do whatever you want to do and destroy your freedom.

Rather, use your freedom to serve one another in love; that's how freedom grows". Galatians 5:13 – The Message

A little over thirty-four years ago I learned that I was going to be a father. Though the joy of that discovery remained as the due date approached, that emotion was joined by fear. Leslie and I were stepping for the first time into the – for us – unknown regions of parenthood and finding the terrain ahead exciting but frightening. Leslie isn't as much of a worrier as I am, and I was discovering a whole host of things to worry about. The foremost of these worries was whether or not I would be a good father. I started worrying about this a great deal. I hadn't taken any classes, at least that I remembered, about being a good parent. I had no idea what to expect or how to handle any unexpected crises in parenting. I was worried about my competence in being a father.

It was during this time that I had lunch with a close friend, Bill Wyatt, who happened to be the pastor at my home church and pastor to my own parents. I told him I was really worried about being a good parent. I remember him grinning at me across the table and with a chuckle saying, "I don't think you'll have any problem." I asked him why? He said, "well you turned out halfway decent didn't you?" I think I must have replied something about that being a debatable observation. Then he said something that took away a good deal of my worry by stating something obvious that I had lost sight of. He said, "you have been learning how to be a good parent for the last thirty-one years.

You've learned by watching your mom and dad parent you! So, I wouldn't worry about it, you'll do fine." I'm not exactly sure that's how he said it, but that's the gist of his comment. He was right! I had learned the art of parenting from my own parents. They must have done a good job. I was alive and not really seriously broken in any way.

I share this to illustrate a wonderful truth we each need to understand as we deal with the worry and the fear that comes with living in the world beset with the Coronavirus, climate change, economic chaos, international saber rattling, racial tension, and the ever-present threat of violence. Like I said, I'm a worrier. My prayers each day are that God protect us as we step ever deeper into what's becoming a frightening future. I imagine your prayers are the same. I pray for God's help in navigating this new reality that encompasses a host of frightening problems and all sorts of end-of-the-world scenarios. There are times I worry about our survival and our competence in dealing with these issues. I pray that God show us the way.

Yet even as I pray that God show us the way I realize that God already has. God has already shown us the way to confront and deal with all the problems that confront us. God demonstrated how to victoriously tackle even the thorniest of our modern-day threats through the life and ministry of Jesus. That way is love. All the problems I've mentioned above have their source in a lot of negative emotions and relationships where love has been in short supply or even absent. If, however, we obey our Lord's command to love – in that is our competence to handle any problem. Here's how that would work.

- Coronavirus – out of love for all others get vaccinated and wear masks. Is it a possible sacrifice? Absolutely. But what love does not involve sacrifice?
- Economic Chaos? Love others enough to share what we don't need and not begrudge others the means through which they might have food, shelter, clothing, and security. Does this involve sacrifice? Probably. But again, what love does not involve sacrifice
- Racial and cultural tension? Love others unconditionally without regard to race, culture, national origin, or sexual identification. Is this risky? Of course it is, and scary too. But what love does not require risk?
- Environmental crises? Love and respect others and ourselves enough to not foul our own nest.

I think you get the idea. In the immortal words of Dionne Warwick and Jackie DeShannon, "What the world needs now is love sweet love, that's the only thing that there's just too little of." That was true back in 1965 when that song first charted and it is

true today 57 years later. As we pray that God show us the way through all the difficulties of our time, we need to remember God already has. Love came down at Christmas. We've had the greatest teacher of love ever. We know how to confront these problems, with hearts of unconditional love. If we start there rather than with fear, distrust, suspicion, hatreds and bias towards others we will find our way through these difficulties.

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