

## **An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for January 22, 2022**

Hello Everyone – It's good to see the sun returning. It's good to see it rising earlier and setting later. It's always wonderful to have more light in our lives! As the days get brighter it is my hope and prayer that the darkness of Covid is also lifting. I'm also hoping each of you can find a way to bring light, laughter, and joy into someone's life today.

**We will be returning to Hybrid worship this Sunday.** Those who come to worship in person will need to remain masked and as distanced as possible. Of course, we will also be Zooming the service so we ask that if you are feeling ill or are in some way immuno- compromised that you stay home and Zoom. We also invite you to Zoom if you feel uncomfortable being in large social gatherings. Please note that we will be celebrating a baptism and are expecting additional attendees.

**Pam Mertz has asked me to include the following information:** "During November and December, 35 face masks were sewn and donated to friends, family and healthcare workers. Also 13 hearts, 1 rabbit and 1 trivet were sold (thank you Penny Pellegrini). This all earned a total of \$48 for the general fund. Thank you for your continued support."

**The Following Announcements bear 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.

**We have begun a new bible study of The Ten Commandments.** We have 16 participants so far. The study meets via Zoom on Tuesdays at 7 p.m. and it's never too late to join. We are using the book by Adam Hamilton entitled "Words of Life". The book is available from Amazon and Cokesbury. If you would like to participate, 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. 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 and either bring them with you to the service or 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. 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.

### **An Encouraging Word**

“Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven. - Matthew 5:14-16 MSG

I don’t where I first learned the importance of leaving things better than I found them. I suspect it was my mom, and I suspect she learned it from her dad, my grandfather. They were both real big on not only cleaning up our messes but cleaning up others messes as well. For instance, when I go to Angels Supermarket, I usually find grocery carts scattered around on the parking lot, left there by someone too busy to take them back into the store. You may think its obsessive, but I’ve been known to gather several, wheel them back into the store, keep one to do my shopping with, and when I’m done with it taking it all the way back inside. Sometimes I may even grab another on the return trip. Yes, I know I’m weird. Some would say it’s not my job, but I would say my job is leaving things better than I found it.

That’s the rule at our lake house up in New York. We always try to leave it better than we found it. So part of staying there will involve painting, carpentry, mowing, and occasional plumbing. We also try to leave the place cleaner than it was when we arrived. That was the rule when my grandparents used the place, it was the rule when my parents used the place, and now it’s the rule for my generation. Maybe it’s because of that rule that it’s grown to be expressed in all the other facets of my life.

We have a purpose as children of God. We are to use our God given gifts to make this world a better place; to leave the world a better place than when we found it. That's what the scripture from Matthew that's quoted above is all about. We have the gift of life, the gift of love, the gift of hope and joy, all given to us by God. That is our "light". When we share these gifts we make our light shine and make the world a better place; hopefully better than we found it. It's a rule I try to apply in many facets of my life. So, as I prepare for bed I often ask myself this question: Have I left each day better than it was when I woke? When I periodically assess my life so far, I consider the people I've interacted with and evaluate how I've enriched the lives of those people. When I leave one congregation for ministry in another, I do so hoping I've left that community a better place and somehow enriched by my time spent there. I think you get the idea. I have to admit that sometimes I don't always measure up and sometimes I fail miserably, but trying to make a positive impact, and considering how I might do that is a positive way to embrace the future.

Of course, the broadest application of this principle occurs as we consider the span of our lives and whether we will leave this world a better place than it was when we arrived. What measure of kindness and love have we shared? What positive difference have we made? How have we contributed to the welfare of our fellow human beings? How have we allowed our light to shine? There is no doubt that we all in some way contribute to the messes which litter our world. The question is whether we have helped to clean them up and then gone the extra mile to improve the situation? When we apply this rule to our work, to our relationships, to how we live each day, and even to how we treat our environment, we will find the world, bit by bit, becoming a better place – one act of kindness at a time.

As you all know we are living in difficult times, but every day we have opportunities to make each day less difficult. We have "light" to share. We can comfort as Jesus comforted. We can love as Jesus loved. We can engage in acts of compassion as Jesus did. We can forgive as we have been forgiven. We have been wonderfully blessed and so may be a blessing. One act of kindness can transform someone's day and make things easier to bear. Your light can be the spark that brightens another's day. It would be a crime to hide it under a bushel. So I leave you with one last thought, it's a quote from inspirational writer and speaker Simon Sinek. "Givers advance the world. Takers advance themselves and hold the world back." With each day look for ways to be a giver. Let your light shine.

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