

## **An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

Hello Everyone – Last Sunday was certainly interesting. Almost everyone, except for the baptism family, stayed home and Zoomed the service from there. Nevertheless, we are going to try for a hybrid service again this Sunday with those who are comfortable being together worshipping in the sanctuary and those who are not comfortable Zooming from home. We'll see how it goes.



**We will be gathering Valentine wishes again this year to share at the February 13<sup>th</sup> Worship Service.** (Thank you, Betsy, for starting this last year!) There are 3 ways to communicate your wishes to the office. 1. Fill out the form attached to this email and return it to the office either electronically or physically, 2. Email me directly, without the form, [mtcarmel21122@gmail.com](mailto:mtcarmel21122@gmail.com) , or 3. Call the office directly at 410-255-8887. **Deadline is February 9<sup>th</sup>.** Limit 3 per person please (and, just like last year, in the spirit of the holiday – they can be anonymous!)

**From Deb and the Outreach Committee - "The Outreach Committee is sponsoring a Cookie Bake or Bring for Valentine's Day for our friends in the area Homeless Camps.** This is the annual Cookie Bake/Bring we normally conduct at Christmas but we were asked to change our event to Valentine's Day this year. Please consider baking or purchasing cookies for this event. The cookies will be collected by Friday, February 11th to be distributed to the Homeless camp in the morning of February 12th. Please make sure your cookie donation is at the church by 5:00 on Friday, Feb 11th. The committee will be packaging the cookies in Valentine bags. I can't think of a better place to be that evening! Thanks for considering this mid-winter project. ~ Outreach Committee"

### **Much of the rest of this first section is repeated information**

**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.

**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 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**

Some sage advice from years gone by - often uttered by my grandfather - goes like this; “never jump off a moving train.” Of course, these days jumping off moving trains is difficult to do. The doors are automatic and won’t open until the train has come to a complete stop. But back in my grandfather’s day people who were in a hurry did jump off moving trains – often with disastrous results. My occasions for hearing this advice had nothing to do with train travel. It had everything to do with rushing into things without slowing down or stopping to consider the consequences. It was his way of telling us kids to slow down, stop, and think before acting, as in “Whoa! Hold your horses! Never jump off a moving train!”

One day back in 1970 I was given a perfect example of why it’s important to “not jump off moving trains.” My dad decided to fertilize our lawn. He had a lot of chores planned for that Saturday and so was in a hurry. He went to our local Southern States Cooperative in Upper Marlboro to buy bags of fertilizer. He had stacked these bags on a handcart, checked out, and was rushing to get them to the car and back to the house. He hastily backed the cart out the door and immediately proceeded down the ramp to the parking lot. If he had stopped to consider the wisdom of backing a cart loaded with 400 pounds of fertilizer down a steep incline, the ensuing disaster would not have happened. But, as usual, dad was in a hurry and he, in the parlance of my grandfather, “jumped off the moving train” that was his busy morning. He lost control of the cart, was propelled backward down the ramp, and was pinned against the car parked at the bottom. The license plate of that car sliced through the artery and most of the nerves in his right leg. If it weren’t for the quick help of the store manager, he would have died then and there. Fortunately, after several weeks in the hospital, several surgeries, and months of physical therapy he was able to walk again but always with a “drop foot” assisted by a brace.

That’s the sort of thing that can happen when we decide to leap without looking or pausing to consider the consequences of our actions. It’s the kind of thing that can happen when life just gets too fast. The Proverbs found in our Old Testament suggest wisdom similar to “never jump off a moving train.” Proverbs 22:3 and 27:12 both declare, “The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.” Proverbs 13:16 tells us, “Every prudent man acts with knowledge; but a fool displays folly.” The Hebrew word being used here is “arum” which in this instance means sensible or prudent – someone who pauses to give thought to their actions. The fool (Pr. 13:16) and the simple (Pr. 22:3) doesn’t pause to think before he acts and ends up with disaster. They jump off moving trains. Hopefully we all know the wisdom of not jumping off moving trains and taking the time to consider next steps.

Quite often our lives may seem like fast moving trains. Sometimes it can feel like we are on an express train to nowhere in particular. Some of us may have briefly considered trying to get on a slower train but jumping off the one we’re on is unthinkable – it’s just going too fast. For many of us life before Covid was a fast-moving train. We were very busy going from one thing to another without pause or rest. For many the headlong rush was unavoidable. We may not have been enjoying the ride but switching trains was inconceivable. Most of us are too prudent to take that sort of risk. The world, it seemed to me at the time, was like a fast-moving train with no way to get off. It brings to my mind the lyrics of a song by Jethro Tull (one of my favorite bands from the 70’s) called Locomotive Breath.

“In the shuffling madness  
Of the locomotive breath  
Runs the all-time loser  
Headlong to his death

Oh, he feels the piston scraping  
Steam breaking on his brow  
Old Charlie stole the handle  
And the train — it won't stop going  
No way to slow down.”

Then Covid hit and our trains came to screeching halts. Suddenly life changed. People started working from home. People rediscovered their families. Once we acclimatized to the change and made all the necessary adjustments, many of us found that we had more time. For a while, we could enjoy sunsets and not have to be rushing off to somewhere. We had an opportunity to get off our rushing trains and stretch our legs. Some of us took pause to consider changing trains from express to a slower excursion route. Possibilities that were unthinkable before Covid brought things to a stop became feasible. We were all given an opportunity to take a breath and consider where we were heading in life and if that's really where we wanted to go.

No matter what is happening in my life, I try to look for a silver lining. If there is a silver lining with Covid it is this; we've been given time to practice prudence before jumping into whatever comes next. In Covid was God deliberately causing us to slow down and consider our paths? I doubt it, but I know that God uses these opportunities, like the relative stillness brought by Covid, to speak to our hearts and allow us to consider new directions. That, I believe, is a blessing.

Life goes on. This train is beginning to move again. I hope that in the pause you've taken the time to consider your next steps, make whatever changes needed, and savor the blessing of time slowed down.

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