

An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for February 5th, 2022

Hello Everyone! As I write this, I'm praying for decent weather this coming Sunday. I think the cold and icy driveways and roads kept most people home last Sunday. Here's hoping and praying that we don't have a repeat this coming weekend. Zoom has been a great blessing during a difficult time, but I think we can all agree that it's no substitute for being able to worship in person. Thankfully, more and more people are getting fully vaccinated and are observing the necessary safety protocols. This makes it possible to move closer to normal – or what will probably be a new normal. Anyway, we will be providing a hybrid worship service once again this Sunday. Communion will be served this Sunday and that is always something better done in person. Since the county mask mandate has ended, we will not be requiring masks be worn during worship. As usual we are asking those who feel under the weather or know they have had close contact with someone Covid -19 positive, to remain at home and Zoom. As always if you are more comfortable wearing a mask in public, by all means do so when you come to worship.

Much of this first section is repeated information



We will be gathering Valentine wishes again this year to share at the February 13th 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, or 3. Call the office directly at 410-255-8887. **Deadline is February 9th.** 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"

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

“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.” 1 Peter 5:9

“Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.” - Mark 10: 15-16

When I was a child, I loved blizzards. It didn't seem to matter that we could hear the wind whistling around the house, and sometimes feel the house frame shudder against the gusts of wind. I always felt safe and warm with my parents close by and the prospect of a winter wonderland awaiting when the storm subsided. If the power went out mom would bundle us up and we would trek through the snow down the hill to my grandparent's house which was heated by a wood and coal burning furnace – no matter what it would always be warm.

When I was a child, I loved thunderstorms and rainy days. (Still do in fact.) It didn't matter how the thunder crashed or how hard the rain fell, I knew my parents and grandparents were close at hand and would make sure everything turned out alright. When there was a lot of rain there was always the excitement of watching the rain swollen brook escaping its channel and roaring across the road. Even with a little rain there was the prospect of playing in puddles when it was over. When we were at the cottage my brother and I spent the rainy days playing games in the attic and listening to the patter of rain on the roof. There was great contentment in that.

The turning of each season was greeted with joy, knowing that each change brought its own kind of magic and adventure – always accompanied by my parents love and protection. Somehow mom always knew where we were and what we were up to, even when we were older, and our adventures took us farther afield into the woods and fields that surrounded our home. Too be sure, there were frightening times, but the fear of those moments was always moderated by the presence of caring adults close at hand. Knowing and trusting in this allowed me to experience the beauty and wonder of each season whatever storms they brought. Even the storms could hold a hidden beauty and magic made even more perceptible, my fear having been removed through the trust I had in those who cared for me.

Now I am an adult and very much aware of the various seasons, beyond the temporal ones, that turn in my life. I experience seasons of joy and heartbreak, worry and trust, of anger and serenity. Yet in each

season, even those that threaten destruction, I know that I am held in the loving hands of God. That makes all the difference replacing fear with wonder. As a Christian I know I'm held in the loving hands of a community of people, my brothers and sisters in Christ. My parents and grandparents are gone, but I'm not alone. I am blessed now with my own family, wife and children who I care for and in whose care I am placed. I'm blessed to be serving a congregation who I care for and in whose care I am placed. Most importantly I'm held in the hands of a loving God. Knowing that God cares for me, I can "cast" my anxiety on God knowing (like a child) that in whatever season I'm facing in my life I am loved and cared for.

Much of the destructiveness and difficulty we face in life arises out of fear and a lack of trust in God, and in the people around them. Those who face the changing seasons and storms of their lives without the knowledge of, or trust in God, can easily be overcome with fear and act in ways that magnify and compound whatever trial they are facing. Those who are able to face those changing seasons and storms, knowing – no matter what – that God will care for them, will be able to withstand any season or storm with grace and with the confidence of children. They will, in fact, be able to enjoy the peace of God's Kingdom, here and now, in the face of any storm. Trusting in God we can experience the seasons of our lives as children surrounded by care and love. We can face our future seasons of our lives, not as times to survive or endure, but with joy knowing that each day holds love, joy, and perhaps even adventure.

Understand, if you are reading this, you are part of a community that cares for you as you face the turning of seasons in your life. Know that you are the child of a loving God who will be with you through whatever season of life you are experiencing and through whatever the storm that presents itself. Give thanks to God and enjoy each day God gives you, rain or shine.

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