

## **An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for February 26, 2022**

Hello Everyone! Even though this is the encouraging word for February 26, you will probably be reading this on February 24<sup>th</sup> which means that if you have not done so yet you still have time to take the Readiness360 survey. Please reach out directly to the church office for the link.

Yes, I know it's a chore. The survey will take between 20 and 25 minutes, and some of the questions may seem redundant or strange but believe me it will really help us understand where we are in ministry and what we need to do to serve church members and the community better. The survey itself has been well designed and tested and has proven to provide accurate information.

By the way, if you are a couple – each of you can submit a completed survey. If you are a youth member, you also can submit a survey. So far, we have had 17 individuals submit – that's 8 short of our goal which is 25 – the suggested minimum. For those of you who have taken the survey **Thank you!**

**\*\*\*\*\*Please Remember! Mark it on your calendars!** On March 12, 2022 we will be hosting a Maryland State **Covid-19 Vaccination Clinic** from 10 a.m. till 2 p.m. in our Church Hall. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and booster shots will be provided. The vaccinations are free and **No appointment is necessary. PLEASE SPREAD THE WORD.** Note: If you have already had at least one vaccination you need to bring your vaccination card. **\*\*\*\*\***

**Here's some repeated but important information.**

**If anyone is interested in volunteering to staff our nursery on Sunday mornings please let me know. We may not be able to staff every Sunday morning, but we can let our young families know those Sundays when nursery will be available.**

**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**

*"He was pierced because of our rebellions and crushed because of our crimes. He bore the punishment that made us whole; by his wounds we are healed." - Isaiah 53:4*

Don't you just love it when someone you work with, who is in some supervisory capacity over you, greets you at the beginning of the workday with the words, "when you have some time we have to talk." Of course, they don't have time to get into it at that moment – and neither do you. The result is that the rest of the day is tainted with some level of worry and fear. As the day progresses, and the proposed meeting put off, the worry grows. You ask yourself, "What have I done? What's gone wrong?" Of course, it may be nothing. But if you have an overactive imagination like me you start to imagine all sorts of possible and calamitous reasons for the proposed conference. Meanwhile your guilty conscience is suggesting all sorts of ghastly scenarios. The result is that the day is ruined, you've gotten practically nothing done, your stomach has produced enough acid to supply the automotive battery industry for a year, and your heart rate would put a jackhammer to shame. It's a terrible thing to have to live a day anticipating the axe about to fall and expecting the worst.

The worst thing that can possibly happen to anyone is, of course, death. The anticipation of a meeting with death somehow sucks the joy out of life. As a child I worried a lot about dying. I worried about what it would feel like. I worried about if it would hurt. Before I knew I would have to meet with death my life was joyful, limitless, filled with wonder, and innocent. Then at some point – I really can't remember exactly when – came the understanding that people die, that my parents would die, and that I would die. (The message of Ash Wednesday; "remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.") To say that this information was a real bummer would be putting it mildly. Life no longer seemed as bright or as limitless or as joyful. Life was waiting for the axe to fall.

Sometime, early in the day represented by the span of my life, Mr. Death pulled me aside and said, "when you have some time – we have to talk". That little reminder could have set the tone for the rest of my life – except for one thing. A friend and coworker I met along the way named Jesus. He also pulled me aside and assured me that whatever Death had to say to me it was no big deal. In fact, he said, "whatever you've done wrong don't worry about it, just don't do it again. I'll take the heat for you. I'll prove to you there is nothing to worry about when you go into that meeting with Mr. Death."

If it hadn't been for Jesus' willingness to take the heat for whatever I did to deserve Death's attention, and his demonstrating to me that my meeting with Mr. Death would be nothing to worry about, my life would have been lived in the shadow of my anticipated meeting with Death, fearing that meeting with Death. That fear would have ruined the day. Instead, in the light of my friendship with Jesus, the sacrifice he has made for me, and his putting Death in his place through his resurrection, I can live joyfully. I now know that under Jesus' friendship and guidance life is limitless and wonder filled. I know that when the meeting with Mr. Death finally arrives it won't be a big deal, nothing to worry about. Because Jesus also had a meeting with Death, and in that meeting took responsibility for whatever I had done wrong. In fact, Jesus confronted Death in that meeting and came away the winner - the message of Easter.

Yes, Mr. Death and I will still have that meeting at the end of the day, but I know it won't be a big deal. Death won't have much to say to me. The truth is that Death won't have any power over me at all! Jesus has dealt with Death, so I really won't have to.

Two thousand years ago Jesus went into a meeting with death, met with death on the cross. In that meeting he took the blame for my mistakes, he paid the price for my sin, and he took away the only power death has over me – fear. Jesus walked triumphantly out of that meeting with death, leaving the office door open, and an empty room behind him where death used to bully people like me, and you – but no more!

On Wednesday we begin the journey of Lent remembering Jesus' journey to the cross. I invite you to observe a holy Lent and contemplate your life and what it would be without the salvation offered in Christ.

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