

## **An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for March 19th, 2022**

Hello Everyone! – Would you believe that with this encouraging word I am entering a third year of preparing and sending it out? The first one was published on March 15th, 2020, just as the Coronavirus was beginning its first surge. We had just been informed by our bishop that we had to close our buildings and find an alternative way to worship. This Encouraging Word began as an effort to keep us all encouraged and connected during a time that we had to remain isolated. It was called “An Encouraging Word” because I was in a hurry to get something out and I couldn’t figure out what else to call it. Much has transpired in these last two years. We’ve learned to live with Covid. Most of us are now protected against it. We’ve discovered new ways of gathering and meeting virtually – so now we have another valuable tool in our ministry toolbox.

Yet as someone once said. “It’s just one darn thing after another”. And so it is here with another crises building. We’ll manage to get through this one too. We’ve seen how God continues to bless – even in the most difficult of times. It will be no different in the times to come. So let us continue “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.”

### **VIRTUAL EVENING PRAYER GATHERING**

Over the last several weeks many of us have been struggling emotionally and spiritually with getting our heads and hearts around overwhelming events in the world. The war in Ukraine is emotionally upsetting for many of us, but it’s not the only thing we’re dealing with. The Coronavirus is still worrisome and the economic, educational, and relational damage it has caused will be with us for a while. Then there are the personal struggles, dramas, and difficulties some of us must contend with in our own homes and families. I’m not bringing this up to bring you down, but to emphasize the need we have in this moment for connection with each other – that we may lift each other up, as well as seek a stronger connection to God through prayer. It is God’s greatest desire is for us to be at peace and to have joy and one way of finding this is through prayer.

So, I will be offering a time of virtual evening gathering and prayer once a week at 7 p.m. beginning this Wednesday evening and extending through April 13th. At that point we will assess whether to continue. Call it what you want, Evening Prayer or Compline – it will be a time of gathering to share our struggles, to be in prayer, to hear encouraging scripture and other readings to put our hearts and spirits to rest. My intention is that this virtual gathering be no more than half an hour. We will be sending and invitation to this weekly Zoom meeting each Monday, so keep an eye out for it.

### **Holy Week and Easter Services**

Just so that you can get it on your calendar, even though its four weeks away. Here is The Schedule for Holy Week and Easter Services.

Palm/Passion Sunday – April 10, 2022 – 9:30 a.m.

Holy Thursday (Maundy Thursday) – April 14, 2022 – Communion – 7:00 p.m.

Good Friday - April 15, 2022 – Worship Service – 7: p.m.

Easter Sunday – April 17, 2022 - Easter Sunrise Service 6:15 a.m.

8231 Bayside Drive, Pasadena

(Home of Dave Shelton's Sister, Joanne)

Easter Sunday – April 17, 2022 – Easter Celebration Service – 9:30 a.m.

**Easter Memorials** – Would you like to remember or honor a loved one this Easter? You may do so by purchasing a flower to decorate the church or you may donate to the Trustees Fund or to the General Fund. I have attached the form to this Encouraging Word. The form will also be available in the Sanctuary.

**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.

**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**

"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long." - Psalm 23: 5 - 6

On December 29th, 1972 Eastern Airlines flight 401, enroute from New York to Miami, crashed into the Everglades as it was attempting to land in Miami. The initial problem leading to the crash was a faulty light bulb that the flight crew became fixated on repairing. They were so busy fiddling with the bulb that no one was flying the plane. The pilot inadvertently disengaged the autopilot and didn't notice the plane descending toward the swamp. The initial problem was the light bulb – what caused the crash was tunnel vision. The flight crew was really stressed out about the light which was supposed to indicate whether the landing gear was down. Was there a problem with the landing gear? Or was it just a bad bulb? The only way to tell was to get the bulb out and look at it. They were all focused on this problem. It was a case of tunnel vision.

Tunnel vision is most likely to occur when a person is under stress. Our senses become tunneled when under stress. Our vision becomes focused on a task we are trying to perform. Our hearing becomes focused on a particular sound. Everything else is ignored. When under stress and experiencing tunnel vision we lose situational awareness. We lose sight of the big picture. We might miss important clues that are critical for our safety or survival. The pilots of flight 401 were so visually focused on the broken bulb that they missed hearing the chime that told them the autopilot had been turned off.

Obviously, tunnel vision can be a huge problem as we navigate through our physical environment - especially when we are stressed out. But tunnel vision can be a spiritual problem as well. Spiritual tunnel vision happens when we get so focused on the effects of evil in this world that we forget to do the things that will keep us spiritually healthy. It is possible to lose sight of all the good things that are happening all around us and get sucked into depression, or at least deeper into fear. If we become too focused on the fear and anger caused by current events, to the exclusion of all the good that is happening, the evil of these days can engulf us.

There is an old expression that quips, "It only takes one bad apple to spoil the lot." I've also heard this as, "It only takes one bad egg to spoil the dozen." We experience this adage at work when our days start off on the wrong foot (get out on the wrong side of the bed). It can ruin the rest of the day. Or we may have a perfect day that gets marred by some inconsequential occurrence and the joy of the day is forgotten, blotted out by the one imperfection. When we focus on our bad experiences to the exclusion of the good, we can become easily so overwhelmed that all we see is evil.

We are witnessing great evil in our world right now. The news on many different fronts is distressing. We are under a lot of stress these days. We need to beware of psychological and spiritual tunnel

vision where all we see is evil, and we become so focused on it that we spiritually crash. Yes, we must recognize and acknowledge the evil in this world, but not allow it to overwhelm us. We need to put it in God's hands, address it in whatever positive way we can, and then move on opening our awareness to the good that is all around us. Understand much of the stress and evil we are witnessing right now has been caused by one bad egg, we mustn't allow that bad egg to cause us to lose sight of a world filled with God's blessings.

Therefore, acknowledge the evil. Pray for one another and all who are affected by it. Engage in positive acts to overcome it like refugee relief. Comfort those in our own communities who are acutely afflicted, who have family and friends in the war zone, the Ukrainians who grieve the violence in their homeland, and the Russians who are just as shocked, sickened and distressed by what is taking place. As we encounter hardship on these shores support and care for each other. Never lose sight of the big picture, that we are all enfolded in the hands of a loving God, whose blessings shall always prevail.

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