

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

Hello Everyone – As I write this I'm surrounded by the sounds of machinery. The tree trimmers are here sprucing up the live trees on the property and removing the dead one. They are even taking out the "volunteer" brush that came up where it was not wanted. They are making everything look clean and tidy; dealing with the flotsam and jetsam of winter. Their activity reminds me of two things. First, that life goes on, even in the midst of crises large and small – life goes on. It's good to keep on keeping on. Second, just like the exterior landscape needs an occasional sprucing up, so does our interior landscape. We need to put our spiritual houses in order from time to time – which is exactly what the season of Lent is all about. My prayer is that you are doing just that, using this Lent to put your spiritual houses in order (and that it's not as noisy as what's going on outside my window right now.) P.S. Thank you Sari for getting all this organized.

**We continue to receive offerings for the support of Ukrainian refugees. These are being sent directly to their aid via the United Methodist Committee on Relief. There are envelopes available in the church narthex. You can also submit a check with "Ukrainian Relief" written in the notation section. You can mail it to the church, bring it in person on Sunday morning, or bring it to the church office. Please use the envelopes for cash donations and write "Ukraine Relief" on the envelope.**

### **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. God's greatest desire is for us to be at peace and to have joy. One way of finding this is through prayer.

So, I am offering a time of virtual evening gathering and prayer, once a week at 7 p.m. We began last Wednesday evening and will be extending it through April 13th. At that point we will assess whether to continue. Call it what you want, Evening Prayer or Compline (a fancy name for evening prayer) – 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 an 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. Whichever way 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**

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” - Philippians 4:6-7

These words of encouragement that follow are not specifically "Christian" in nature, but I don't believe that Jesus would refute any of what I have to say. This is just some practical information about getting through these stressful days with our sanity and good cheer still intact. I offer it to you as advice from a friend who has experienced these things working in his own life.

A few days ago the American Psychological Association published the findings of a survey they just completed. The survey deals with the anxiety Americans are feeling these days. The results of the survey are striking. Eighty-seven percent of Americans are anxious about the economy and inflation. Eighty-one percent of Americans are anxious about global uncertainty. Eighty-one percent of Americans are anxious about supply chain issues. Eighty percent of Americans are anxious about the war in Ukraine, and eighty percent of Americans are anxious about Russian retaliation, expanding conflict, and nuclear war. This last one hasn't reached these levels since the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. Consider also that this is following on the heels of two years of a pandemic.

Of course, I didn't need a survey to tell me all of this. I'm experiencing a high level of anxiety concerning all of these. From what I gather from discussion with some of you, many in our congregation are exactly where I am; worried, anxious, and stressed. After a week of enduring a flood of nightmare inducing information and the resulting angst, I decided enough was enough and started obeying many of the following dos and don'ts of surviving in an anxious world. Much of this information is what we go over in our Wednesday evening prayer meetings.

Here are some don'ts that work for me.

1. Don't overdo it with your diet of news feeds. By all means stay informed but not to the level of sacrificing your sanity. I avoid CNN, Fox New, NBC news, CBS news, ABC news and the like. All of these news outlets do deliver the news with the acknowledged goal of informing, and the un-acknowledged goal of drawing the viewer in with sensationalism. After all they are selling add space, and the more viewers they hook the more they make, and nothing sells like drama and tragedy. If you must watch, limit it to half an hour or so.
2. Don't subject yourself to the abundance of anxiety producing visuals. This goes along with the first "don't" listed above. Visuals are much more penetrating to the psyche and are the bread and butter of broadcast video news.
3. Don't listen to talk radio, for the same reason as number 1 above. No matter what side of an issue you are on talk radio will just make you mad and more anxious and we don't need that right now.
4. Limit your social media experience, some of what comes across social media is disinformation or misinformation. We don't really know what to believe and what not to believe when it comes to social media, but it will ratchet up our anxiety. If you do subscribe to information gleaned from social media fact-check it from other independent sources.

Here are some of the do's (in no particular order) that work for me, or have worked for me in the past.

- Pray and study scripture, tune in to God, engage in spiritual practices like meditation.
- Exercise – Walk, do aerobics, swim, golf, play tennis, walk your dog. Do whatever gets your heart rate up.
- Keep to a regular schedule. Keep to your routines. Go to sleep at the same time, get a full eight hours of sleep.

- Spend quality time with family and friends doing fun stuff. (But even a team effort at cleaning the house will work.)
- Do something that makes a difference for someone else; acts of kindness to neighbors, strangers, and friends, and charity toward refugees, etc. This helps us avoid feeling of powerlessness in the face of fearful events. Knowing we are doing something helps.
- I used to watch news before going to sleep. Big mistake! I now watch Rom-Coms, comedy acts, SNL replays (on YouTube). Laughter is great medicine. It's better going to sleep with a chuckle than it is to go to sleep with a sob.
- Wind down by listening to soft, good music (nothing jarring). I listen to blues, jazz, and classical; they all work for me.
- Read poetry or a good book (I avoid suspenseful fare that's too close to the reality we are experiencing right now).

These are just a few of the things that can be done to lower our anxiety levels. I have absolute confidence in God and am absolutely positive we aren't facing the end of the world. Yet there will be very anxious times to come when we will each entertain doubts and fears. Fight the anxiety. Live well. Believe in God's love, goodness, and provision. Keep calm and carry on.

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