

## **An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for April 2, 2022**

-  
Hello Everyone – As some of you know this week has been a difficult one for our family, and especially for Leslie. My brother-in-law Darren, Leslie's brother, passed away on Tuesday after a brief illness. We want to thank everyone for their prayers for Darren and your prayer and support for our family through this difficult time. As I write below, we all face times of darkness and shadow in our lives but what makes life in those times possible is the promise that light always follows the darkness, and that resurrection always follows the grave; it always awaits us. We also know that in whatever partings we experience in this life that we have been brought together into a congregation that cares, comforts, embraces, and prays us through those times. Thank – you.

**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.**

**Pam Mertz sends this report:** During January and February, 34 face masks were sewn and donated to friends and family. This earned \$34 for the general fund. I have resumed attending church in person and am once again selling craft items during coffee hour. Thanks to all of you for your continued support. - Pam Mertz

### **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 13<sup>th</sup>. 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.

**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**

*"And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. ... "*

- Genesis 1: 2b – 5

From the beginning God created a world of contrasts, beginning with the day contrasted with the night. Because of this contrast we know the joy of a breaking dawn following the shadows of the night. Without this contrast we would not be able to savor the warmth of the rising sun on our face driving away the chill of the predawn darkness. Living in the absence of light makes the light's arrival all the sweeter.

A few years ago, I was introduced to this wonderfully addictive snack – Gardetto's Original Recipe Snack Mix. There are all sorts of tasty morsels included in the mix, some which I can do without and one which I can't. The morsel that stands out for me is the roasted garlic rye chip. I would always hunt those out of the bag first. I'd either separate them out for last or eat them first. Either way I could never get enough.

I guess I wasn't the only one lusting after those rye chips because several years later Gardetto's included in their product lineup a bag of *nothing but* roasted garlic rye chips. Now I don't have to hunt for them anymore. I can grab a handful of them any time I want. There is a problem with this wonderful accessibility of rye chips, however. One can easily tire of a steady diet of rye chips – especially if you buy the one-pound bag. The chips

are no longer delightful treasures to be found among lesser morsels of mini pretzels, Chex cereal, and mini sesame seed breadsticks. If all you have is rye chips, then they are no longer special.

So, to coin a phrase from Forest Gump, life is like a bag of snack mix; you never know what you will get when you reach in the bag. You won't always end up with a delectable rye chip. You may end up with the less flavorful bread stick. Let's just call this snack bag philosophy. In a bag full of rye chips the rye chip is no longer special. Likewise, in a life filled with nothing but fairy tale blue skies, no day will stand out as special. You need the darkness to make the bright days stand out. You need the night to know how much you yearn for the day. I don't know if our bad days are an absolutely necessary evil required to make our good days stand out in contrast. But I do know we all get bad days, whether we want them or not, and we need to make the best of them. What makes the bad days bearable is the knowledge that there are also good days in the bag and great ones as well. They will be all the sweeter standing in contrast to the bad ones.

I've discovered that there are few skies more beautiful than those that are a mix of clouds and sun, blue and varying shades of grey – often with rays of sun beaming through. What makes those skies so beautiful is the contrast between bright and dark; the blue, white, and grey. When I am up at our cottage on Chaumont Bay, I'll lie out on the dock soaking up the sun. Upstate New York Skies are rarely completely blue with so much moisture coming off Lake Ontario. Normally on a summer day the blue sky is filled with fluffy white cotton ball clouds marching across it making for intervals of intense sun followed by intervals of shade. It's irritating when one of those puffy clouds blocks out the sun and the sun's warmth is replaced by the breeze carrying the chill off the water. Yet that interval of darkness makes the return of the sun much more welcome.

In the church we celebrate liturgical seasons in addition to the environmental seasons of Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall that everyone else observes. Right now, we are in the midst of the Epiphany/Lent/Easter cycle of seasons. Liturgically speaking it is a time of contrasts. Epiphany is the season of light and the focus is on the light of Christ entering the world. That is followed by Lent, a penitential season where the focus is on repentance among other things. In Lent we confront our sin and brokenness. But then the relative darkness of lent is replaced by the everlasting dawn of Easter morning and the season of Easter which focuses on resurrection and new life that is eternal. Lent begins with reminders of human mortality – that we are ashes and dust which makes the dawn of Easter morning even more joyful and brilliant by contrast.

We all know that life is a mixed bag with nothing guaranteed. We experience the truth of Matthew 5: 45b, "for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous." We also know that clear skies follow the rain, that the dawn follows the night, that Spring relieves the death of Winter, and that there is always sun on the far side of the cloud. Some choose to live their lives anticipating the worst, living in the light anticipating the cloud. You and I however, as Christians, are called to live always anticipating the light, anticipating joy (even as we experience sorrow), and anticipating in everything resurrection. That's what Easter is all about.

*Weeping may linger for the night,*

*but joy comes with the morning. - Psalm 30:5b*

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