

An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for April 9, 2022

Hello Everyone! - If you're like me you are getting very impatient for Spring to arrive. It seems that winter is just hanging on. The flowering trees seem to be impatient for it as well, wanting to flower but just not quite there yet. All that does is make me even more impatient. Let me assure you that the promise of Spring is just as sure as God's promise to Abram (discussed more fully below). It will arrive just as sure as Tax Day. (Why the IRS would want to ruin Spring with Tax Day is beyond my comprehension.) Anyway, spring is coming, you can count on it. In fact, it's part of one of God's promises, to follow on to some scripture I quote below. Genesis 8:22 declares, "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease." In other words, keep the faith! Pretty soon we'll be complaining about the heat.

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 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.



From the Trustees: Calling on all gardeners or those who like to garden, some of the flower beds around the church building are in need of some love. With only 12 days before Easter, we would like to concentrate on the flower beds that are at the cross, and on either side of the breezeway. If time permits, we can work on the others. Also, seeking volunteers to help with re-setting the ceiling tiles in the fellowship hall and classrooms. **This Saturday, starting at 9:00 a.m.** – mulch will be provided. Come and help for as long as you can or are able. Thank you!

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

'He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness'. - Genesis 15: 5 - 6

I wish I could play piano. One thing I really regret is not following through on the piano lessons I took when I was a child. My grandmother played the piano and was willing to teach my brother, sister, and me. But I found it boring, a lot of work, and practicing was a chore. So, when my family moved from central New York to Maryland and Grandma was no longer available for piano lessons I didn't continue. I had had enough. Consequently, I am left to marvel at other people's playing abilities having none myself. I didn't have enough confidence in myself to carry on, to see it through, and be able to claim a wonderful ability.

Our relationships with God can follow the same pattern. Often people start out on a journey of faith with God but find the rewards slow in coming and the challenges too difficult. Sometimes people begin the journey expecting immediate rewards and that their lives will become a bed of roses. Then they encounter the thorns and lose interest quickly. Often the rewards of living a life of faith seem slow in coming, we tire of the journey, and don't stick it out long enough for the life of faith to bear fruit.

The story of Abram reminds us that the life of faith, though filled with questioning and doubts, will eventually bear fruit beyond our imagining. Abram remained faithful to God even though it began to look like God's promises were going to

turn out to be empty words and that Abram would remain childless. Abram didn't give up on God. He resisted the temptation to change horses in the middle of the race. He was eventually rewarded for his faithfulness in that he became the father of a great people and his life was transformed.

The journey of faith is like that. It's rarely easy. It requires dedication even in the face of doubts and questions. And when crosses loom on the path it requires courage, inner spiritual strength, and a trust in God that will carry us past the crosses to the place where we will experience resurrection. Even in the face of doubt Abram trusted in God and the Lord rewarded it as a sign of righteousness. God will do the same for us. Doubts and questions are OK. It's when we no longer bother with them anymore, when we no longer bother to work at faith, that we'll find ourselves in trouble.

These days our faith journeys may be hitting some rough patches. I know mine is, perhaps yours is too. It's normal to be filled with questioning and doubts concerning God's purpose in days like these. Considering all that is facing the world, the church, as well as the personal struggles that some of us are enduring, questioning, and doubting as it concerns our future is to be expected. When I'm at my worst and doubts threaten to overwhelm me, I find comfort and inspiration in Abram's story. He had been standing on God's promises for a long time. Old age had caught up with Abram and Sarai (the original names of Abraham and Sarah before God changed them). Sarai had even lost so much faith in God's promise of descendants that she presented her Egyptian maidservant, Hagar, to Abram who would bear him a son, Ishmael. However, this was not what God had promised them and the fulfillment of the promise of children through Sarai continued to be delayed. Through the barren years of his old age Abram remained faithful, even when the fulfillment of God's promise seemed a ridiculous possibility. Finally, when Abram was 100 years old and Sarai 90, the promise was fulfilled in the birth of Isaac.

As I said, the story of Abram reminds us that the life of faith in the promises of God, though filled with questioning and doubts, will eventually bear fruit beyond our imagining. God promises us many things in scripture. During these difficult days there are several that I ground my hope in.

1. God will give me strength. (Isaiah 40:31) *Though I may doubt my own ability to endure any given trial, God will sustain me.*
2. No matter what happens God's love for me will never fail. (Isaiah 54:10)
3. God will never forsake me. (Deuteronomy 31:6) *God will never forget about me or abandon me.*
4. God has promised eternal life. (John 3:16) *No matter what happens to me in this life, God's promise extends beyond the grave. We're getting ready to celebrate that promise in about a week.*
5. Finally, amid the chaos of viruses, war and rumors of war, and the eruption of evil in our world, we have this promise. "Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done." (Genesis 8: 21b) *I see this as implicitly suggesting that God will save us from ourselves.*

So yes, at times it may seem that the world is coming apart at the seams. Yet I also know that as God was faithful to Abram in the fulfilling of the promise of descendants, so will God be faithful to us in fulfilling God's promises to us. As we continue to have faith in God's promises to us, trust in God even in the face of what we are experiencing in the world, we will be led through to a place of peace and joy, in this world and the next.

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