

An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for April 22, 2022

Hello Everyone! – Well the Easter rush is over. All the preparations for celebrating the resurrection of the Lord are behind us for another year. What now? Where do we go from here? That answer is pretty simple. We get on with the work to which our Lord has called us. We declare the truth of Jesus' resurrection and victory over death by engaging in ministries that make resurrection real. We go about the work of comforting and caring for God's people in ways that free them from the power of death as it is experienced in their lives. We carry on the work of Jesus declared in Luke 4: 18 – 19

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

Here's an announcement that may be of interest from our sister church Mt. Zion UMC. Please share it with anyone who has need.

YOU ARE ALL INVITED! Mt. Zion United Methodist Church, 8178 Artic Drive, Pasadena, is hosting an ongoing Food Giveaway on May 19th, 2022 at 10:30 a.m. Everyone is welcome to attend.

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.

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“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.’ Acts 1: 8 - 9

There is an item that has been on my Amazon wish list for quite a while. So far no one has seen fit to gift it to me but I remain hopeful. It’s a T-shirt featuring the words, “Beam Me UP Scotty! There’s no intelligent life down here.” Sometimes that’s just the way I feel – not the part about there being no intelligent life – but the desire to be beamed up and out of the confusion I face daily. It’s the command “Beam Me Up” that I want to say Amen to. All too often I feel besieged by the craziness of this world and long to be in a place that is somehow above it all. I wish that I could simply utter those iconic words from Star Trek and be transported to a higher plane.

On the day that Jesus was transported to the high plane of Heaven he left behind his loyal disciples who, I am sure, were wishing they could go with him. Instead they had to go back into the world and serve the Lord in ways that focused everyone’s gaze on the higher plane of God’s Kingdom. They had to be in the world, but not of the world. That’s never an easy task. The world is so overwhelming, its problems so confusing, and its temptations so seductive. It’s easy to become disoriented and lose sight of God’s Kingdom, living as we do in this one. This is especially so in times like we are living in now.

How can we stay focused on the Kingdom of God and live our lives in ways that lift us above the confusion of the world? In Jesus’ final address to his disciples, recorded in Matthew and Luke, he lays it all out for us. Essentially, it’s this: be grounded in the scriptures and in prayer. It’s in the scriptures that we find our comfort and the assurances of God’s love. It’s in the scriptures that we find the guidance that we need – especially in confusing times. It is in prayer that we remain connected to God and become aware of God’s presence in our lives.

We also stay focused on the Kingdom of God by doing Kingdom work that is fulfilling the great commission (Matthew 28: 18 – 20) and referred to in the quote from Acts 1 above. This includes witnessing to the love of God in ministries that comfort, heal, forgive, feed, and restore all of those who have been caught up and chewed up by the world. We engage in Kingdom work in ministries that let everyone experience the love of God. When we focus on God through study, prayer, and service we will find ourselves “beamed up” to a higher plane of existence where we can experience the glory of God while still living in this confusing world. We can experience the joy expressed in the refrain of the hymn “Higher Ground” written by Johnson Oatman Jr.

I’m pressing on the upward way,
New heights I’m gaining every day;
Still praying as I’m onward bound,
“Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.”
Lord, lift me up and let me stand,
By faith, on Heaven’s tableland,
A higher plane than I have found;
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.

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