

An Encouraging Word for April 30, 2022

Hello Everyone – It's been a strange week so far. The internet and phones at the church have been down since Saturday making our normal office routine a little more difficult but certainly not impossible. My thanks to Joe Shanefelter and Sean Harris for attempting repairs on the technical end and of course to Jennifer for attempting and succeeding in the almost impossible task of dealing with Verizon and getting a repairman out to fix things. (The problem was something only Verizon could repair.) So as I write this Verizon is speeding to the rescue. Our apologies to those of you who attempted to Zoom our worship on Sunday. I'm confident that things will work out better this coming Sunday.

**This Sunday we will be serving communion.** Convenient disposable communion packs are available at the church office and in the Church Narthex. If you are Zooming worship and need communion elements (wafer and juice), please let us know, or come by the church to pick a communion pack up. Church office hours are 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday through Wednesday. We may also be able to arrange delivery if you have need.

**We need to train, and have available, several individuals to operate the technological aspects of our Sunday Worship services on those days when Shannon and Joe are unable to.** Please let us know if you are interested in helping in the ministry of our church in this way. You can contact either myself or Shannon Shanefelter.

**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**

“Keep loving each other like family . . . So let’s continually offer up a sacrifice of praise through him, which is the fruit from our lips that confess his name. Don’t forget to do good and to share what you have because God is pleased with these kinds of sacrifices.”

- Hebrews 13: 1, 15 – 16

One thing I remember from my days on the high school cross country team is our coaches pep talk. Sometimes it would happen when we were all still on the bus. Sometimes he would gather us together and talk to us right after our warm – up or the tour of the course. It was really just basic information, things we already knew but had a habit of forgetting. He would encourage us with advice like, “Stick to YOUR pace – don’t let others set your pace for you.” “Run smart.” Whatever that meant. For those of us who had developed bad running habits he would remind us to “mind your form”. “No contact!” That was his warning not to foul another runner which was something several of us had a problem with. These were the things we needed to remember to do in order to find our way to the finish line and place well.

The letter to the Hebrews, a portion of which I quoted above, is a pep talk of sorts. It was written by a Christian leader to a community of Jewish Christians, probably in Rome, who had been enduring persecution. Like my cross-country coach’s pep talk this was basic information for members of that community to remember in order to find their way to the Kingdom of God - the finish line. It was what they needed to remember as they were running the race of faith. It’s summed up very well in the 13th chapter and especially the last verses cited above. 1) Keep centered on God through worship. 2) Stay connected in a fellowship of mutual and unconditional love. 3) And assure the role of a servant by doing good and sharing what you have. It’s pretty simple advice and fairly easy to remember though not always as easy to execute while out on the course and running the race of faith.

This advice is just as appropriate now as it was during the times of religious persecution. To be sure, we are not being openly persecuted for our faith here in the United States, though open persecution does continue in other parts of the world. However, our faith can be attacked in subtler but no less effective ways. Controversies and dissention that do not strike at the heart of our faith can divide and weaken the body of Christ – the community of the faithful. Therefore, we must remember we are family and called together for mutual support. Fear, of which there is plenty right now, can move us toward more selfish and inward ways of living that further erodes our connection with each other and with God. Therefore, we need to remember that in the “race of faith” we are running to remain humble, assuming the heart of a servant, sharing what we have with others as need arises. To battle fear, we must remain connected to God in a life of worship and praise, looking to God for the courage and spiritual strength to stand against fear and the destruction fear causes.

As we run the race of faith toward the goal of God’s Kingdom, we need to consider how we are doing on these three points. Are we staying centered on God through prayer, meditation, worship, and praise? Are we connected with and caring for each other, remaining humble, and maintaining the bonds of unconditional love? Are we seeking to live as a servant by sharing what we have and doing all the good we possibly can?

The days we are now living in, filled as they are with fearful and heartbreaking events, can be a challenge to our faith and spiritual equilibrium. Left to our own devices we may be led to question our faith or even abandon it. Spiritually speaking these days are just as dangerous as those experienced by Christians under open religious persecution. We have that in common with the persecuted church in Rome to which the letter to the Hebrews was addressed. The advice it gives is just as appropriate for us as it was for them. If we take this “pep talk” to heart we’ll have no problem running the race of faith in these difficult days and crossing the finish line, realizing the Kingdom of God in our midst, even in a world filled with difficult challenges.

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