

An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for May 7th, 2022

Hello Everyone – It's hard to believe we are already entering the 5th month of 2022. It seems that only a few weeks ago we were celebrating Christmas and here we are past Easter. There are lots of plans being made for fellowship and fundraising as we move toward the Summer and Fall. Please keep looking in this space for updates.

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.

Is someone in your house graduating high school or college? If so, please let us know so that we can celebrate them. Please contact the office to let Jen know who it is and their future plans.

The early planning stages for our October Harvestfest have begun! Pat Mulkey has a good start on the event but is looking for some eager volunteers. If you are interested in helping make this event a success, please let us know. Contact the office and Jen will point you in the right direction.

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

“Pray for kings and everyone who is in authority so that we can live a quiet and peaceful life in complete godliness and dignity. This is right and it pleases God our savior who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

- 1 Timothy 2: 1 – 7

Sincere and earnest prayer is one of the greatest sources of encouragement that we can have. Prayer is our connection with God, an amazing vehicle that can transport us into God’s presence. When used rightly it can bring us the comfort and serenity we need in these troubled times. It can mend broken relationships. It can restore a sense of security. It can bring God’s healing presence into situations of despair and occasions of fear. It is a wonderful gift from God. But, like all gifts prayer can be used in ways that dishonor God and foment continued worry and distress. In order for prayer to be the deep well of strength and encouragement that it is meant to be we need to take care in the ways that we pray.

It's happened to all of us. Someone is mean to us or hurts us in some way and we are left feeling betrayed and embittered. It may be that we are having problems with our employer and feel we are being treated unfairly and are resentful. We may even start thinking of those who we are resentful toward as being an “enemy”. Perhaps we are caught up in the political polarization that is so much a part of our living these days and regarding those of opposing political views with suspicion and anger, again placing them in the camp of the “enemy”. It's in these times that we have a choice to make; either to curse the other or pray for them. One choice will send us down a destructive spiral that could end in spiritual death. The other decision, to pray for our persecutors, will send our relationship with that other upward on the path of healing and peace.

Paul, in his letter to Timothy, asks that Timothy and the congregation he was leading pray for everyone, even those in authority. In other words, they were to pray for the very people who had been persecuting the church; the enemy! Paul knew that praying for them, rather than cursing them, was the only way to bring peace to their hearts which would otherwise be burdened by fear and poisoned by anger. Praying for everyone also

presents the possibility for healing the wounds that divide people. This attitude of prayer makes life immeasurably easier. True prayer transforms the heart of the one praying from being consumed with self to being consumed by God. In that we will find blessing and peace.

There is one caveat to this, however. Our prayers need to be pleasing in God's sight. As I mentioned above our prayers need to be voiced out of a sincere love and respect for those for whom we pray and for God. Our prayers need to come out of an attitude of humility that acknowledges the value of the person for whom we pray. Otherwise, our prayers can be corrupted into expressions that cause further harm. It is possible to weaponize prayer into something that is no longer prayer and gives no glory to God. For instance, I've had people say to me, with venom in their voice, "I'm going to pray for you!" That sort of expression and the prayer that comes out of it is merely a further expression of anger that divides. I've heard politicians use prayer as a veiled political speech that is merely the advancing of their own agenda over someone else's. Prayer should be used to unite rather than divide. Prayer should express humility and an honest desire for the good of another.

As we pray for another we are to pray for God's blessing in their lives. It can be the first step in the healing of relationships between people. It's an acknowledgement of their worth. It is an expression of our love. It is the lifting of that which is broken, whether that be broken hearts, broken spirits, broken lives, or broken relationships into the heart of God where restoration and healing will be found. This kind of prayer is pleasing to God and in it we will find the burdens we carry of fear, hatred, and distrust lifted from us.

Of course, prayer is so much more than what I've been able to describe here. But if it is not at least these things, it is not prayer. We live in very troubled times and prayer is the greatest resource for our spiritual survival - but only if we use it justly. It's the sincere prayers of loving hearts humbly lifting our brokenness to God that will transform our hurting world and bring peace to our souls.

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