

An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for May 12, 2021

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.

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An Encouraging Word

'Now the woman was a gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Sir,^[a] even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.'" ' Mark 7: 26 - 28

Jesus had bad days just like the rest of us. Jesus wanted to get away but it seemed that there was no place where he could escape notice. He tried to take a holiday in Tyre, outside the Jewish territory where he could be incognito. Even there he was recognized and besieged. A woman desperate to save the life of her daughter found Jesus and begged for his help. His response, in the scripture quoted above, is shocking and seems out of character for Jesus. Essentially, he told her that his ministry was for the Jews and not the Gentiles, then he used a disparaging label in referring to her and her people. This doesn't seem to have been one of Jesus' finer moments. It was a very human moment.

Often when confronted by this scripture we try to avoid its harshness. We try to rationalize or explain what is clearly a mean-spirited comment. But there is no avoiding the fact that Jesus was having a human moment. What is important for us to understand is how he dealt with this momentary lapse and who helped him regain his bearing. The woman didn't meekly slip away. She didn't let Jesus' disparaging comment slide or ignore it. Instead, she challenged Jesus and refocused his words in a way that invited Jesus to refocus his own response with his characteristic grace. In other words, she became the teacher to Jesus who became the student. She playfully and respectfully reminded him of who he was and what he needed to do.

As lay people and clergy called to ministry in the church, members of the body of Christ, we will all have our bad days. Ministry is not easy, it can be frustrating, it can be physically, emotionally, and spiritually exhausting. Life these days can be the same, whether we are engaged in ministry or not. We are only human. We will all have our weak and unguarded moments just like Jesus did. Yet we have a responsibility to each other in this community to hold each other accountable, just as the Syrophenician woman held Jesus accountable. We need to pray for the grace to gently, perhaps even playfully, remind each other of what we are here to do – care for each other -and carefully lift each other out of our weak moments.

In our most difficult times, it may be helpful to consider some of the weak moments we have had. Consider moments when we were on the edge of civility. Then remember the ways that someone else got you back on track. Give thanks to God for the shepherds in our lives that help us refocus, recenter, and get on with the business of caring for others. Then consider ways you can do that for others as they face those inevitable weak moments.

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