

An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for June 18, 2022

We are including a message from Bishop LaTrelle Easterling regarding the shooting in Smithsburg on Thursday, June 9th:

June 10, 2022 | A Message from Bishop LaTrelle Easterling

Colleagues,

Yesterday (June 9th) there was a shooting at Columbia Machine Inc. in Smithsburg, near Hagerstown. Initial police reports indicate that three people were killed and one was wounded. The gunman and a police officer were also shot and injured after the gunman fled the scene.

United Methodists are grieving. Shiloh UMC in Hagerstown has members closely affected by the shooting. One of the victims is a member's son and another is related to many people in the congregation. We share their grief and pray that God will be an abiding and comforting presence for them in the days ahead.

As the people of God, our first response must always be prayer, for those injured or killed, the pain caused by those realities, and the violence we so deeply lament wreaking havoc in our midst again. We pray for comfort, healing, and peace.

And as we pray, we are also called to process what is occurring both immediately and over the longer term. Even as we pray for those directly involved, we are all affected – at risk from hatred, from the proliferation of weapons and the ease with which they are procured, from rhetoric that creates fear and pits human being against human being, and our collective stress in feeling perpetually vulnerable.

Echoes of the shootings at Uvalde, Buffalo, and others throughout the nation still ring in our ears. The tragedy that has touched the lives of the people in Smithsburg and the surrounding area today will reverberate into the community's heart and identity for years to come. It seems we can barely catch our breath before the next tragedy occurs. And yet, I pray that we will never allow ourselves to become complacent, or to believe that our prayers and our actions can't make a difference. Just as efforts to create greater safety in travel have reduced deaths by wearing seatbelts, common sense regulation in the acquisition and type of weapons available will reduce the loss of life in mass shootings.

Unfortunately, we can begin to predict the response to this tragedy. We know that leaders will call for thoughts and prayers. We know that advocates will be silenced with the false narrative that it is too soon to discuss restraint. What we also know is that soon the predictable tension between whether guns kill or people kill will emerge. And, gun lobbyists will line up to offer condolences for lives lost without offering proposals of any comprehensive gun reform to lessen the probability of this type of massacre ever happening again. What we know is we will spend our time analyzing the mental health of the shooter while excusing our nation's inability to protect the most vulnerable.

And so, even as I cry out, "how long, O Lord," I turn to the people of the Baltimore-Washington Conference and ask you not to harden your hearts, but to let your hearts keep breaking, as we put our faith in God and our hands to work, raising our voices in lament and working together to create *shalom*.

We will pray together, we will keep healing together, and we will commit ourselves and our resources to addressing the violence as breaking stories of active scenes continue to unfold in our communities and our nation. We turn to God, and to one another, and we connect in hope and action. Enough is enough.

Blessings and Peace,
Bishop Easterling

From the Outreach Committee: "The Outreach Committee always sponsored a food drive for NCEON every winter. We were all set to go in 2020 when the pandemic hit and our church found a different way to worship. Instead of having a big food drive now when we all feel the pinch of inflation, we will highlight items

that NCEON needs now. As you can imagine, the need is greater than ever. So for the next few months we will ask for 3 or 4 items that NCEON requested.

For the month of June, we are requesting rice (any kind), fruit cups, cereal, and tea bags. Please feel free to donate just one item or more and place it in the box located in the Narthex marked NCEON. The committee will see that the items are delivered on a regular basis. We think we can all handle this type of food drive. We thank you in advance for your help. I wonder what will be on July's list?"

Summer Sunday School is underway!! This means you can come to Sunday School in your play clothes and enjoy some crafts, maybe outside activities, and some videos. So if you are between the age of 3 and 10 or 11 (just finishing the 5th grade), come join us for a fun time during our church service at 9:30 am starting June 5th. Hope to see you there! Deb McMurtrey and Mt. Carmel Sunday School

The United Methodist church has two locations for summer camp opportunities for children and youth. Manidokan is in the Maryland mountains near West Virginia and West River Camp is on the water south of Annapolis. Both locations have week-long camps for children from grades 3-5, middle high students from grades 6-8 and high school students. Our church will provide up to \$500 total in campership aid for children or youth from our church interested in attending this year. For more information about the camps please contact the Camp Office directly at 800-922-6795 or check out the schedule at bwccampsandretreats.com.

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.

For those interested in volunteering with the Harvestfest, there will be a short meeting on June 26 after the morning service. If you are interested and cannot make the meeting, please 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.

An Encouraging Word

"I can do all things through him who strengthens me." - Philippians 4:13

This is a scripture quote that I've used before in these Encouraging Words, but I think it's one worth revisiting given the state of things in our nation and world. You've probably noticed that our daily dose of distressing news is not abating. The Coronavirus has just become the background against which we are experiencing a parade of troubling situations and events. Each problem demands solutions which seem impossibly challenging. Taken en masse, these problems seem enormous and unassailable. However, we need to remember that nothing is impossible for those whose trust in the Lord.

The seventeenth chapter of 1st Samuel teaches us this lesson. It's the story of how a young man, no more than a boy, took on the champion of an opposing army with nothing more than a sling and five smooth stones. It's the story of David slaying Goliath of course and it's one that has captured my imagination from an early age. This is more than just a children's story, it is a declaration of faith wonderfully summarized and expressed by David in 1 Samuel 17: 37. 'David said, "The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of that Philistine." ' David, who had always known the protecting hand of the Lord in his life, placed his trust in the Lord as he faced this seemingly unassailable giant named Goliath. He faced an impossible situation with faith and prevailed against it.

We seem to be facing an army of Goliaths in our world right now. Seemingly unassailable problems threatening our security, our physical and emotional wellbeing, our financial stability, and the harmony and civility of our communities. These Goliaths are complex and multi-layered making them even more fearsome. We need to remember as we face them that, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God." - Hebrews 6:18

Placing our trust in God will reward us with a serenity of mind and spirit through which we can find solutions to intractable problems. The armies of Israel ran in fear from the giant Goliath, not exactly a testimony to their trust in God. David's nerve and hand were steadied by his trust in the Lord. It allowed him to advance toward his adversary rather than retreat from him. We need that kind of steady nerve and clarity of thought as we face our Goliaths these days. That kind of serenity only comes through faith.

Trust in the Lord comes through spending time in God's presence; that is by dwelling in God's word, attending to prayer and meditation, and engaging in service to the Lord. It also comes by reflecting on the ways that God has been with us and blessed us in the past. I have faced a number of tremendously difficult situations in my life. As I reflect on each one, I've come to understand that God was carrying me through each time. God acted in my life in each situation to care for and protect me. This may have been through God presenting me with new opportunities, or sending someone to comfort and guide me, or even miraculously intervening in a situation on my behalf. As I consider all the ways God has brought me this far my faith is strengthened for the journey that remains. Supported by my knowledge of God's faithfulness to me through numerous ordeals I can calmly face whatever trials are yet to come. In the words penned by John Newton, "Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come; 'tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home."¹

So yes, there are many Goliaths out there in our private lives and in the world that we collectively face. God gives us the strength to face each one trusting in God's grace. Whatever it is that we are facing,

the truth remains, "those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40: 31).

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

¹ Amazing Grace, John Newton 1779, verse 3.