

An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for August 27, 2022

******There will be no Wednesday Evening Zoom this week. Wednesday Evening Zoom will resume Wednesday, August 31st. Sorry for any confusion. ******

Attention Trustees - The Fall season is fast approaching and work of the Church for the new season will begin. Due to the Labor Day holiday, the Trustees will meet on September 12, 2022 at 7:00 p.m., in the fellowship hall.

Plans for the Harvest Festival are in FULL GEAR! There is a sign-up sheet in the Narthex. Feel free to sign up at any time! If you have any questions or ideas, please contact the office and we will send you in the right direction. You can also donate to the event. Please just specify "Harvest Festival" in the memo line of your check. **Please SAVE THE DATE of 10/8!!**

The Outreach Committee reminds everyone that we are still collecting food for NCEON. For the month of August we are collecting canned meats. They are requesting **canned chicken, tuna, and Spam**. If you forgot to bring in your items for June or July, it is not too late. They are happy to receive any non-perishable food item you may want to donate. Just to let you know, our church gets credit for every bag of food we deliver to them.

We understand, summers can be busy. So, we want to remind you that we are still using Zoom for our Sunday Services. Zoom allows you to join us from wherever you may be!! (Join us in your pj's with a morning cup of coffee) 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. 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. **If you should have any problems logging in, please alert Jennifer in the office.**

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.

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.

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

"When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying . . .

- Matthew 5: 1-2

You may be wondering what sort of encouraging words these are? Well I believe that these words begin a body of scripture which may be the greatest source of encouragement for us. These words begin Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In that sermon Jesus lays out his vision for righteous living and sacred community – a community bounded by principles of humility, respect, forgiveness, acceptance, and love for others. It's a vision that is tremendously important today as we encounter a world where community is fractured.

Over the next few weeks my sermons and these encouraging words will be focusing on the scriptural guidance we receive from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7). I must admit that my reasoning for this is selfish. Like most of you I find myself living day to day through a confusing constellation of conflicting information, alarming and divisive rhetoric, distressing events, and soul wrenching reminders of the fragility of community. I have found that when I'm facing this kind of difficult landscape guidance is needed. So, I'm digging into these three critical chapters in Matthew in search of guidance and taking you along for the ride. I believe that the instruction found here is critically important as we navigate the often frightening, confusing, and even alarming events happening in the world right now.

I'll be dealing with Jesus' teachings found in Matthew Five over the next few weeks in my Sunday morning sermons. The teachings of Matthew Six and Seven will be the subject of the next few Encouraging Words. My prayer is that in these explorations you will find some measure of encouragement.

In the Ten Commandments God laid out the rules for the maintenance of the community of God. Their concern was for the Jewish people's relationship with God and with each other. They are all about maintaining a righteous relationship with God and with each other in a blessed community. Disobedience of these commandments resulted in the breaking of relationships between God and among people, the destruction of community, and so the commandments were central in the lives of the Jewish people as they lived together as the Children of God.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is essentially The Ten Commandments Version Two. In his sermon Jesus reinterprets, focuses, and refines God's commandments in a way that clarifies misinterpretations. He made these guardrails for the community more accessible and immediate to the concerns of his listeners. But it is still all about righteousness. It's about a better righteousness. This sermon is about maintaining a righteous relationship with God and with each other in a blessed community. That has not changed, and ignorance of these truths results in the fracturing of our relationship with God and the unity of our human community.

The fracturing of community is what we are experiencing now. The road back to unity, civility, and the healing of the bonds that have been broken is laid out in Jesus' teachings, the core of which is found in this sermon delivered from the mountainside. Here we will find instructions that lead us back to God through the respect of God and others, humility, forgiveness, compassion, acceptance, love, and joyful living. As Jesus will remind us in the sermon, when we conform our lives to these values we become the leaven, the salt, and light that can restore our sense of kinship and unity within our community and across the world. I believe that when we start applying these principles in our own lives we will find our lives more hopeful, joyful, and at peace. Please stay tuned as we explore the encouraging vista of our Lord's vision of community together.

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