

An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for September 10, 2022

There will be another planning meeting THIS SUNDAY after the 9:30 service to discuss the rapidly approaching Harvest Festival. We hope many of you can stay and help. 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!!**

Regular Sunday School will start THIS SUNDAY for children between 3 years old and students in the 5th grade. We are continuing the tradition of presenting Bibles to the students entering the 3rd grade. This year we will present Bibles during the worship service on September 18th. Also, we are still looking for a volunteer teacher for the 4th Sunday of the month. If you feel young at heart, we are looking for you. You can talk to Leslie Fauconnet, Sarah Jenkins, Donna Helowicz, or myself to find out just how much fun you can have one hour a month. -Deb McMurtrey, Sunday School Coordinator.

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 this Monday, September 12, 2022 at 7:00 p.m., in the fellowship hall.

We are continuing our food drive for NCEON in the month of September. For the entire month we will be collecting **canned vegetables and canned soups**. We will also accept any of the items we requested in prior months. We greatly appreciate all the food items you have given in the past months and they are always happy to receive our donations. NCEON stands for North County Emergency Outreach Network. It is located on 5th Avenue in Glen Burnie and helps people in our area with food and emergency services. Our church has supported this organization for over 30 years. NCEON is open on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings. You can check out their website at NCEON.com. -Thanks. The Outreach Committee

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

There have been many times in my life that I have longed for a simpler life unburdened by the concerns that drive so many of us these days. A less distracted life where I could focus on the "spiritual" life, meditate on metaphysical stuff, and be more devoted to God. But when all is said and done such a life would probably not serve God as well as living a God focused life out in the world with all its distractions and disruptions. Jesus encourages us not to retreat from the world but to live in the world while maintaining the Godly values that are often in opposition to worldly values. Giving in to the worldly distractions that lure us away from God, and the resulting mayhem these can cause in our world, is the subject taken up by Jesus in the portion of his Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew 6: 19 – 24. Here he encourages us to be in the world and not of the world. He makes his point by focusing on our attitudes toward wealth and possessions.

As I've said before, both in this encouraging word, and in the last two sermons I've preached, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is about establishing and maintaining a right relationship with God and with others. A good deal of the brokenness that we experience in our world these days, and the fracturing of our relationships with God and others, arises out of our attitude towards money and possessions. Our daily struggles to acquire and keep wealth, possessions, and the status derived from them is one of the things – perhaps the greatest thing – that distracts us from God and leads us toward behaviors that fracture our relationships with God and others. Paul reminds us in 1 Timothy 6:10 that "the love of money is the root of all evil". The reason he says this is because our love of money often supplants our love for God. Our tendency is to wind up seeking after things of value by worldly standards while putting the things and values of God on the back burner.

Jesus encourages a healthy attitude toward money and our possessions that place us in a right relationship with God and everyone else. He does this by first reminding us that while money and possessions may seem important, they are not the "be all" and "end all" of human existence. They don't last, they are vulnerable to the tides of time and circumstance and so are not worthy of our abject devotion. What is permanent and resilient are the values that are modeled and desired by God, the very values set forth in Jesus' sermon on the mount. These are attitudes that are treasured in heaven, attitudes like forgiveness, humility, piety, patience, forbearance, respect, and mercy. These attitudes have as much value in today's world as they did in Jesus' day. Their value is lasting. Money and possessions are fleeting, the values Jesus encourages are not.

Conversely, to value money and possession over the things of God, leads us into behaviors and attitudes that can harm the loving community God intends. We tend to categorize people according to their monetary worth, creating division where there should be none. We tend to acquire wealth and possession at great cost to others less fortunate, though not always intentionally. Money and possession can easily become a divisive element in society and even within families.

But it can also be a vehicle for accomplishing great good, which leads me to Jesus' discussion in verses 22 and 23 of "healthy and unhealthy eyes". Here Jesus is drawing on Jewish literature, primarily in Proverbs, concerning people with an "evil" eye or a "good" eye. An "evil eye" refers to a grudging, envious, or miserly spirit. You could say that Jesus, in speaking of someone who has an "unhealthy" or "evil eye", is describing someone who is inwardly focused. Their concern is for themselves. Grudging, envious, and miserly are certainly not godly qualities. Neither are they community healing attitudes. Such people may be community focused but only insofar as the community around them can serve them. Jesus reminds us that just as a blind person's life is darkened because of an eye injury or disease, a miser's life is darkened by failure to deal generously and compassionately with others.

A "good eye" on the other hand refers to a generous and compassionate attitude, one which duplicates God's loving spirit. Proverbs 22: 9 declares, "He who has a bountiful (good) eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor." The one who possesses a "good" or "bountiful" eye is focused outwardly on the needs of others, the needs of community. For them wealth is not as important as the good it can accomplish. Our money and possessions can be a vehicle for accomplishing great good if we disperse it with a generous and compassionate spirit, in line with the values set forward by Jesus.

Jesus concludes this advice about wealth and possessions with the familiar adage, "You cannot serve God and wealth." The focus of each is diametrically opposed. In one we are focused on God, with the other we are focused on self. With one we are aligning ourselves with the God of mercy, justice, and compassion and become God's instruments in acts which heal the brokenness of this world, including the fracturing of community. With the other we are aligning ourselves with attitudes which can promote the disintegration of our communities and society and contribute to the lack of civility we are currently experiencing.

The fracturing of community we are witnessing around us, and the incivility evident in so much of the discourse we hear, arises out of an individuals or groups struggle for the possession of wealth, status, and power. It would seem that for them these worldly standards have eclipsed the principals valued by God. Jesus guides us along a different path. It is one that leads us toward establishing or re-establishing a right relationship with God and our fellow humans. It's one that results in healing and the restoration of community as we focus not on the needs of self but the needs of others and direct our God given resources toward the healing of this nation and all nations and the restoration of sacred community.

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