

An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for September 17, 2022

We are having so much fun planning for the upcoming HARVEST FESTIVAL! 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!!**

Speaking of Harvest Festival, Pre-Order your soup, chili and apple dumplings NOW!! I have attached a form for you use. All pre-orders must be submitted by October 1st. Your yummy treats can be picked up during our Festival October 8, 10-2. Don't miss out on these HOMEMADE TREATS!

Regular Sunday School has begun 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. We will present Bibles during this Sunday's worship service. 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.

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 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.

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An Encouraging Word

Worry seems to be a constant companion; for some of us more than it is for others. These days we seem to have lots to worry about. We worry about political stuff, we worry about economic stuff, we worry about family dramas, we worry about our health, you name it. We even create things to worry about, things my dad called "straw men" which is unproductive.

Worry has a positive side. Worrying about something, as long as it's a legitimate worry, can help us prepare for future events. For instance, I worry about why my check engine light came on this morning. It's a legitimate worry that hopefully will lead me to taking my car into the shop. If, however, I were to start obsessing about that worry it might cause me to do something outrageous and over the top – like buying a new car. Worry has a positive place in our lives, but it can get out of hand and lead to inappropriate or even destructive acts.

One kind of worry that we seem to obsess over most of all is money. This is because money in our society is the means by which we obtain the things necessary for our survival, things like food, shelter, and clothing. In our culture money is the means by which we obtain and maintain comfortable lifestyles which we would very much like to preserve. Our identities can become bound up in the styles we wear, the cars we buy, the vacations we take, the entertainments we pursue, even the food we eat (sirloin rather than spam). We tend to define ourselves by all that stuff. Sometimes we become so obsessed with this worldly kind of focus, worried about maintaining what we have, that we can be led to words and acts that are hurtful and destructive.

In Matthew 6: 25 – 35 Jesus encourages us to adjust our focus away from the things we normally worry and obsess about and shift our focus toward God. "Therefore, do not worry, saying 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles that strive for all these things; and indeed, your heavenly Father knows you need all these things." He then suggests that we seek after the Kingdom of God, and God's righteousness.

As I've said before, the word righteousness as used here, refers to a right relationship with God and with those with whom we share this earth with. It can in fact be extended to also refer to our right relationship with the natural world. And Jesus has already set out how this is achieved through acts and words of mercy, forgiveness, humility, respect, piety, and generosity. As we focus on these positive attitudes in the living of our lives we come into a right relationship with God and others through which our needs are met. "But strive first for the Kingdom of God and God's righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well."

The question is, where is our focus? Is it on God and the things of God or is it feeding our own vanities. One may still bring reward, but at the expense of our right relationship with others and with God. The other will bring rewards which will include positive nurturing relationships with God and the people around us. In other words, are we worrying about our relationship to worldly cares when we should be focused on our relationship with God and others? Are we willing to let go of our worries and focus on God? Jesus suggests that when we do, we will be led to a place of great blessing. If we

are not, we may be heading for a life of compounding worries in growing isolation from God and others.

If we don't let go of unreasonable worry we may find ourselves engaging in words and acts that are destructive to ourselves and others. Many of you have probably heard about the way natives in South America, Asia, and Africa trap monkeys. They will hollow out a gourd or a similar kind of object. Then they will drill a hole in it just large enough for the monkey to reach through and attach the gourd with a stout string to a tree. Then they'll place some delectable item inside the gourd and the trap is set. The monkey will come along, sense the presence of the delectable item inside the gourd, and reach through the hole to grasp it. Unwilling to let it go, the monkey is trapped.

When we get carried away by unreasonable worries about worldly things, unable to let go of them, we can become trapped in those worries and led into behaviors that are destructive to our lives and our relationships. There's been a lot of that going on these days. We have worries that are stoked by both mass media and social media. We have worries about not having enough, or not having "what we deserve" stoked by advertising. We also have worries stoked by every political party concerning the economy. Are they reasonable worries? Well, only if they are based in fact and I have a feeling many of them are not. In any event, if we get carried away in these worries, they can lead us to living in ways that are counter to those values lifted up by Jesus in his Sermon on The Mount.

The best advice is just to focus on God through whatever worry we may have. In Jesus preaching he calls us to live in a community bound together in love, care, and mutual respect; a community defined by forgiveness, mercy, and compassion. It's a community in which we may still have things to worry about, but we can face them together living in ways that overcome worry with trust in God and in each other.

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