

An Encouraging Word from Pastor Mike for November 30, 2022

Christmas 2022 Memorials – Would you like to remember or honor a loved one this Christmas? You may do so by purchasing a poinsettia to decorate the church; or, instead, you may prefer to donate to the general fund or to the trustees' fund. To honor or remember family members or friends, please complete the form attached to this email and return it to the church. (Forms can also be picked up at the church as well) **The deadline has been extended to December 14.**

Our Holiday Bazaar benefitting both the Child Care Development Center and our Church is only a little over a week away, on Saturday, December 10th 9-2. We are having a Bake Table and **NEED BAKERS!** There is a sign-up sheet in the hall on the bulletin board. The bake table was a HUGE success at the Harvest Festival. Let's make it an even bigger success at the Bazaar! Please don't wait to sign up!! Or contact Cathy Jones.

Mt. Carmel Church and The Child Development Center will be sponsoring a Christmas "Sock and Mitten Tree" again this year. We are asking for donations of socks, gloves, mittens, hats, and scarfs (adults and children's sizes). You may bring these items into the school between December 5th, and December 16th. The items collected will be donated to local families in our area who are in need for the winter season and will help keep them warm. Thank you and May God Bless all of you, Mt. Carmel Church and The Child Development Center

If you are visiting the church during the week, please be careful of the children at the school. We ask that if you are driving in during drop-off or pick-up hours that you wait behind the cars as to not endanger any of the children getting in and out of the cars. These lines move rather quickly. Morning hours are typically 8:15-9:15 and then afternoon is usually 11:30-12:30. If you have any questions, please contact the office.

It is already time for Outreach to roll out projects for the holiday season. We are doing things a little differently this year. We do not need to prepare the Thanksgiving Fixing bags for our friends at the soup kitchen this year. Those items are being provided by the Food Bank. However, with the cost of groceries, more people are coming to the soup kitchen for help. The shelves are as empty as I've seen them. **For the months of November and December our food collection will benefit the Pasadena Soup Kitchen with shelf-stable items that stretch a meal like pasta, mac & cheese, rice and instant mash potatoes.** We are completely out of those items. The Child Development Center will be helping us with this project. Regular size items are needed, not the super-sized items found in the big-box stores. **For Christmas we will be receiving names from the county for the Holiday Sharing program.** We have requested the names of 5 small families and 5 seniors in our area. We will be asking members and friends to help by providing help with the cost of a Christmas meal and presents for the children. This is the program we have been helping for many years. We should be receiving those names from the county in the next few weeks. We thank everyone for their continued support during this holiday season. -Thanks. The Outreach Committee

Regular Sunday School has begun for children between 3 years old and students in the 5th grade. 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 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.**

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

"Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." - 2 Corinthians 12: 7b – 9a

A watershed moment in my life occurred when, as a youth, I saw the musical "Godspell" performed on stage. It was during this performance that I realized that Christianity, and the Christian faith could be "cool". One song from that musical has continued to resonate with me, teasing me to explore my journey with Jesus amid various trials and tribulations that have tempted me away from the path altogether. The song is entitled "By Your Side". The character singing the song is asking if she can follow Jesus to wherever he is going. That journey however will be complicated due to a pebble in her shoe that she names "Dare". It's a pebble that she inserted herself and that she hopes one day to remove and cast away. Well, that's my interpretation of the song, there seem to be quite a few but this is the one I choose.

This song teases me with questions. Why would anyone put a pebble in their shoe? Why would she call the pebble dare? How can you journey with Jesus while in pain? Whether the song's composer intended to stimulate these questions I have no idea, but they are the questions that the song stirs in me.

So here is where those questions have taken me. At one time or another we will all carry painful burdens even as we attempt to follow Jesus, pebbles in our shoes. Paul refers to his own as a thorn in the flesh. It may be a burden imposed upon us, or it may be the result of our own bad choices or mistakes. It may be the burden of fear or anger. It may be emotional pain or incessant doubt. It may

consist of worries or concerns that overshadow everything else and take away our joy. It may be the burden of physical disease, personal loss, or worldly care. It could be any number of things. Whatever it is it's something that's not easily cast away, and it dares us to either continue with Jesus or abandon him. As we carry the burden, we are tempted each day to give in to the pain it causes. We are dared to either double down on our faith in Jesus and act accordingly or abandon that faith in spiritually destructive ways.

I've been carrying a tremendous pebble in my shoe for quite a while now. It is the burden of worry and concern over worldly matters. Some days it is overwhelming and drowns out everything else. Sometimes this burden provokes anger and fear that could take me to very dark places and thoughts. The temptation to follow those feelings and entertain that negativity is always there, but so is the invitation to step out in faith and trust in Jesus. The choice is always mine. I can respond to the "thorn in my flesh" with bitterness and anger which will lead me into ever darker places, or I can respond by doubling down on my faith in Christ, trusting in God's promise, "never will I leave or forsake you". (Hebrews 13:5 , Deuteronomy 31:6) I choose to do the latter.

What is the pebble in your shoe? What is the thorn in your flesh? In what ways is it tempting you to live? Is it with continued faith in Christ or are you tempted to abandon that faith and take matters into your own hands. Consider the possibility that whatever the thorn or the pebble it may present a blessing in disguise– an invitation for you to allow Christ to share the burden. Is it possible that the pebble presents an opportunity to grow in faith as you trust Christ to help you bear it's weight and it's pain?

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