

Announcements and Encouraging Word for March 1, 2023

The Faith Hope Circle will be meeting this Thursday, March 2nd at 12:30 in the church hall. All ladies are welcome to attend. Please bring your lunch and a drink.

Volunteers NEEDED - We will be having a MCUMC Work Day on March 4th from 8am to 2pm. We are looking to spruce up our church. We could use all the help you can give.

From Pastor Mike - Some of you may know that I'm engaged in a seven month long program intended to renew and strengthen my own faith journey and my ministry. Part of that program requires me to participate in the **Lewis Pastoral Leadership Inventory (LPLI)**. To successfully complete this inventory, I need some help. Some of you will be receiving an invitation to also take this inventory and answer questions concerning my effectiveness in ministry. Your responses will be anonymous. The results of this survey will help me adjust my ministry to serve the church more effectively. If you receive the invitation to participate, I ask that you respond and complete the survey within the next several weeks. Your help will be greatly appreciated.

On Saturday, March 11th at 1pm we will be having a Celebration of Life for Nobu Asaki here at Mt. Carmel. There will be a luncheon in the hall immediately after.

There will be a very important Administrative Council Meeting on March 22nd at 7pm at the church. All council members are strongly encouraged to attend. The District Superintendent will be our guest.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!! PASTA NIGHT WILL BE SUNDAY APRIL 2, 4-7PM. Buy your tickets today. \$12 for adults and \$8 for children. You can contact me by phone or email in the church office. We are also selling tickets on Sundays. **Please spread the word. I've attached a flyer. Please feel free to print it out and distribute it in the community. We need your help to make this night a success!**

Are you following the church on social media? If not, you should! Our Facebook account is <https://www.facebook.com/mtcarmelumconnection/> And our Instagram account is <https://www.instagram.com/mcumc21122/>

Please share this with everyone!!! Mt. Carmel Child Development Center has an immediate opening for a full-time, energetic and creative teacher to work with their 2's, 3's, and 4's combined class. The hours are 7:00 am - 4:00 pm, Monday - Friday (1 hour lunch break). A 90 hour Child Care Certification and a minimum of 1 year related work experience are required. If you want to work in a supportive, fun environment, this is the job for you! Please send a resume to Dawn Rey at mtcarmelcdc2@gmail.com.

From the Outreach Committee - We will continue to collect shelf-stable food items for the Pasadena Soup Kitchen. They recently received a good amount of canned goods from the Maryland Food Bank so they are almost caught up with the supplies they need for the near future. However, there is always a need with the price of food increasing almost weekly. If we get the Soup Kitchen caught up, we could go back to helping NCEON with our donations. We will keep you updated. But for the time being, please continue to donate. Every little bit helps someone in need. Thank you.

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 church email is mtcarmel21122@gmail.com and our phone number is 410-255-8887.

Prayer Cards are also available in the Narthex on Sunday morning. If you have a prayer or concern, we encourage you to fill out a card and it will be collected and read that morning.

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.**

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 from Pastor Mike

"Behold, how good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity!" - Psalm 133: 1

There is an old joke I first heard in seminary years ago. It goes something like this. A wonderful Christian man died and found himself at the gates of heaven where he was greeted by St. Peter. St. Peter welcomed this sainted man with open arms and invited him on a tour of Heaven, his new home. St. Peter showed the man many wonderful sights. He saw the endless gardens where he was surrounded by absolute beauty. He strode past great halls where heavenly choirs were singing. He saw glorious columned structures where the Saints gathered, conversed, and prayed for those who remained below. At one point during his guided tour they came to an area bordered by a wall. As they walked along the wall, they passed a gate. St. Peter indicated that they needed to remain silent and not talk near the gate. Once they had moved on and St. Peter had indicated that it was alright to talk again, the man asked why they had to remain quiet near the gate. St. Peter responded, "Oh, the area through that gate, on the other side of the wall, is where we keep the (insert denomination name here), and they think they're the only ones up here. We just don't want to break their hearts by telling them they aren't." Yes, the joke is a poke at the exclusivity of certain religions and denominations. But it also points out the absurdity of a divided Heaven or Kingdom of God. God is not divided or segregated, neither is God's Kingdom.

God is creator and sustainer, the force which draws us together and binds us together in love. Scripture declares that God is love, and love is a binding force not a destructive one. The act of creation itself is an act of God's love binding all the elements of creation together. Ever since the fall recorded in Genesis God has been at work seeking to restore community as God intended it before sin entered and destroyed that unity. The ultimate act in this effort was the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus which destroyed everything that separated us from God.

That God seeks unity in God's creation is evident in much of Jesus teaching, especially that found in his Sermon on the Mount. Here we find lessons that encourage us to love one another, even those we deem to be enemies. Here we are encouraged to engage in actions that encourage the building of relationships rather than the destruction of them; forgiving, turning the other cheek, praying for those who persecute us, etc. In the gospel narratives we find that Jesus deliberately ignored barriers that divided community by associating with foreigners, sinners, and those considered unclean. In his ministry we first see the inclusiveness of God's Kingdom.

God's Kingdom, the kingdom toward which we all aspire, is the archetype and embodiment of community. There is no greater unity or higher form of community. That which divides, what we call sin, does not exist there. The imperfections of this world, marred by sin, divided against itself in countless ways, no longer exist. God is not divided nor is God's kingdom.

Yet even we who claim Christ as savior persist in our divisiveness, in our judging of each other, and in our disrespect of those who do not look, act, think, or believe like us. Some of us even emphasize and leverage these differences for personal gain; calling for further division. We'll never gain the kingdom this way. How can we seek a kingdom of complete community while living in ways here and now that divide community? It's absurd, just as the joke I began this essay with is absurd.

If the heart of our Lord is truly in us, if God's love truly moves through us and sustains us, we would seek the unity that God seeks. Inspired by the Holy Spirit we are called to bring healing rather than division. We are called to seek common ground rather than build walls. We are called to live toward the unity of the Kingdom rather than resist it. We are called to build bridges of understanding between people, not blow them up.

Those who seek separation or divorce from those they don't agree with, those who seek to divide and build walls, those who wall themselves off in enclaves of political, racial, cultural or religious purity, will be brutally disappointed with heaven I'm afraid. There will be no walled off enclaves there.

We live in a time when division seems to be the easiest way to overcome our differences. It is occurring in our denomination, and now some extremists are suggesting a national divorce. But we need to remember the old adage that "united we stand, divided we fall". United we lift each other toward the unity of the Kingdom. Divided we enter into chaos in this life and the life to come. We anticipate and prepare for God's future Kingdom now by building community in this one. No better encouraging word can I leave you with today that this from 1st Corinthians 1:10, "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment."

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