

Announcements and Encouraging Word for March 15, 2023

Would you like to remember or honor a loved one this Easter? You may do so by purchasing a flower to decorate the church or you may donate to the Trustees Fund or to the General Fund. Please complete the form attached (and found in your bulletin on Sunday and copies in the Narthex) and place it in the offering plate or in the lockbox on the Church office door. Checks should be made payable to Mt. Carmel UMC. **Deadline is Friday, March 31st.**

Holy Week and Easter Services

Holy Thursday (Maundy Thursday) – April 6, 2023 – Communion – 7:00 p.m.

Good Friday - April 7, 2023 – Worship Service – 7:00 p.m.

Easter Sunday – April 9, 2023 - Easter Sunrise Service 6:30 a.m.

8231 Bayside Drive, Pasadena

(Home of Dave Shelton's Sister, Joanne)

Easter Sunday – April 9, 2023 – Easter Celebration Service – 9:30 a.m.

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! We need you to spread the word!!**

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/>

On Wednesday evening, March 22nd, at 7 p.m. there will be an important church meeting that everyone is invited to. THE ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL MEMBER ARE STRONGLY URGED TO ATTEND! This meeting will be held in person and led by our District Superintendent Sarah Schlieckert. Not only do we need to put in a good showing, this meeting will be important and instrumental in setting our course as a congregation moving forward. The environment within which we do ministry has changed dramatically within the last several years. District Superintendent Schlieckert will be sharing with us some insights concerning demographics, the changed ministry environment, and resources we may want to consider as we plan for the future. She also wants to hear from you your thoughts concerning ministry as expressed by our congregation. **IT IS VITALLY IMPORTANT THAT COUNCIL MEMBERS BE PRESENT BUT WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE AS OTHER MEMBERS ATTEND AND PARTICIPATE AS WELL.**

From the Outreach Committee - "For the past six months we have been collecting food items for both NCEON and the local soup kitchen. Your contributions have made a huge difference to both organizations. Personally, I can tell you that it made a great difference to have extra items to add to the food bags at the soup kitchen. Outreach thanks everyone who helped with this project. The Maryland Food Bank has come through with extra food for both organizations, so we are temporarily stopping the food drive. We may pick it back up if the need arises.

Outreach is about to launch another local activity where everyone can help. But we are not quite ready to announce our plans. We are waiting until after Easter to start this project. I can ask you now not to clean out your linen closet just yet. Hmm, I wonder what that could mean? Watch this space."

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.

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

An Encouraging Word

Perhaps it's time to surprise the world again with an inclusive love like that taught and demonstrated by Jesus, rather than the exclusive kind of love that's so often implicitly encouraged by "the church" these days. Of course, all churches and congregations say they are all about love and acceptance but if we dig a little deeper, we might find that the love and acceptance may be somewhat conditional in some congregations. That's why I used the word "implicitly". I put "the church" in quotations as well since many churches and congregations promote all-inclusive love and actually do walk the talk; yet there are far too many that don't. There is an old saying that I'm afraid is still in force that says, "Eleven a.m. on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America." I'm afraid that's still true, not only racially, but also culturally, politically, and if I really want to be honest along gender preference lines as well. The sad truth is that the church is so divided that our message of God's love and redemption is lost to those who have been estranged according to distinctions that Jesus never really made.

The good news is that this dividedness or segregation is not the way of Jesus. There is a better way! One that is inclusive regardless of race, culture, politics, gender preference or whatever. Last Sunday our scripture reading presented one of the best examples of Jesus confounding the political and religious divisiveness of his day. We read from John 4: 5 – 42. The reading was quite long but verses 7 through 10 are especially revealing.

“A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)¹ Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”

Here Jesus is ignoring the cultural and religious divisions that were encouraged in his day. He completely obliterated the walls that divided or excluded. Rule one: Jewish men, especially Rabi’s did not associate with strange or unaccompanied women. Not only was it bad optics (someone could get the wrong idea), but it also violated Jewish purity laws. Further, in many quarters’ women were property and beneath theological conversations. Jesus doesn’t care. He engages her as he would any other human being.

Rule number two. Do not associate with Samaritans (a foreigner). There was a long-standing enmity between the Jews and Samaritans. Essentially Samaritans were considered to be beneath contempt. Jesus doesn’t care. The woman, a Samaritan, is as much in need of Jesus teaching as anyone else be they Jew, Gentile, or Samaritan. Incidentally this is not the only place that Jesus teaching crushes the wall that divides Jew from Samaritans. Lest we forget we have the parable of the Good Samaritan which casts a Samaritan as hero and Jewish priests and Levites as villain. The bottom line here is that Jesus made no distinction between peoples of different religions, cultures, races, or genders. Neither should we.

Yet it seems that we persist in our tribalism’s. We outwardly preach love and acceptance of others but in practice fall short. Now we live in a time of growing tribalism and division, not only in our churches but also in our communities. People even speak in hushed tones about the likelihood of civil war – the ultimate tragedy. The church needs to decide. Will we contribute to the divisive and mutually exclusive rhetoric, or will we declare the all-inclusive love of Jesus? The world probably expects the former from us given our track record of division and disaffiliation. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could surprise the world with a message of all-inclusive love – the message that Jesus taught?

The Samaritan woman’s gender or culture was unimportant to Jesus. What was important to him was that she understand the “living water” he offered her; the promise of eternal life, offered to her without regard to any of the cultural, racial, or religious distinctions and codicils. It is because Jesus ignored the religious, gender, and cultural walls that his society erected that a foreign woman became aware of her importance as a child of God. In fact, she became the first evangelist in the gospels as she declared to everyone she knew the wonders of Jesus’ teaching.

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