

Announcements and Encouraging Word for May 24, 2023

There will be NO SUNDAY SCHOOL this Memorial Day Weekend. Summer Sunday School will begin on June 4th.

Please note that there will be NO ZOOM NEXT SUNDAY, June 4th. You should have already received the zoom information for this Sunday earlier in the week. Please contact the office with any questions.

Congratulations to our most recent high school and college graduates. Read all about Megan, Katie, Aiden and Nicholas in our 2023 Graduates Attachment to this Encouraging Word. There will also be an insert in this Sunday's bulletin.

All women and friends are invited to join the FAITH HOPE CIRCLE for our annual Spring Luncheon at the Green Turtle, Thursday, June 1st at 12:30. Hopefully the weather will cooperate and we can have lunch on their patio. Please RSVP by May 28 to Marilyn Williams or Pat Johnson if you can join us. Hope to see you there to enjoy good food and fellowship.

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/>

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

As some of you may be aware the landscape through which we are called to follow Jesus has become particularly treacherous over recent years. It's easy these days to be lured in directions that compromise our message as Christians and our call to serve as Jesus disciples. There is a seductiveness in the propaganda and disinformation that we are being inundated with, especially from those who would subvert our faith for their own ends. How can we maintain our spiritual

equilibrium in the competing political, religious, and cultural crosscurrents that buffet us daily and continue to be true to the gospel of Christ?

So here is a reminder of who we are called to be and what we are to be about. These are hallmarks of Christian discipleship, not necessarily in any particular order. Keeping them in mind can help keep us on course. First, it should be self-evident, but we tend to forget that we are called to put our faith in a higher power, not in other human beings, or even human values. Psalm 118:8 declares, "It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put confidence in mortals." And Jeremiah 17: 5 – 6 reminds us,

"Thus says the Lord:

Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals
and make mere flesh their strength,
whose hearts turn away from the Lord.

They shall be like a shrub in the desert
and shall not see when relief comes.

They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness,
in an uninhabited salt land."

As Christians we are called to serve God, not a political party, and God's platform stands on unconditional love, grace, forgiveness, and tolerance. We are called to love our neighbors, practice humility, forgive our persecutors, care for the foreigner, feed the hungry, love our enemies, heal the sick, and all of this without exception. We need to remember that if the words of someone demanding our attention reek of anger, intolerance, or outright hatred; if it demeans another, vilifies, incites violence against another, is abusive toward a culture or race, or disrespects another's humanity, those words are not of God. To put it bluntly, it is sin.

Jesus reminds us in all things to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Matt. 6:33. This means that as long as our focus is on God's Kingdom and God's righteousness (those values that reflect God's desire that right relationships be restored between humans and between humans and God) that our needs will be met, God will take care of us. We need not depend on "the world" or the promises of humans to provide these needs. If we are seeking the Kingdom of God, we need to avoid paying attention to ideas or rhetoric that serves to divide or demonize. It's pretty easy to discern such rhetoric in our current national discourse. In fact, it stands out like a sore thumb.

God has provided us a clear path through these treacherous times in the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus ate with sinners, reached out in love to foreigners, and mingled with those considered in those days to be unclean or untouchable. He resisted the politicalization of his ministry (he didn't fill the role of rebel leader that some wanted to attach to him). Lest we forget he forgave those persecuting and executing him from the cross. Jesus gave us a pattern of sacrificial love that encourages us to care for others, even the stranger, before caring for ourselves. Jesus claimed us all as brothers and sisters, regardless of culture, nationality, political, and I would venture to say sexual persuasion. We should be regarding each other in the same way. I'd say that Jesus life and teaching provides clear guidance for us as we live through these days of political/religious intolerance. My encouragement is that we try to follow it in the living of our lives.

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, and please stay connected to each other and to God.

Blessings & Peace, Mike