

Encouraging Word and Announcements for June 7, 2023

The 239th Session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference met last week. For an overview of what took place, please visit <https://www.bwcumc.org/news-and-views/for-bwc-its-all-about-love/> It was a very moving conference filled with lots of ups and downs.

ATTENTION ALL CHURCH COUNCIL MEMBERS – we will be having a brief BUT IMPORTANT Council Meeting on Monday, June 12 at 7pm. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss and vote on an opportunity to shift the way our building fund is invested to better meet the present and future needs of the congregation. John will explain what we want to do but we NEED authorization of the Council to do it.

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

The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling^[a] together;
and a little child will lead them.

⁷ The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

⁸ The infant will play near the cobra's den,
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.

⁹ They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,

for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

This prophetic vision from the mouth of Isaiah, gives us a beautiful vision of the wonderful future that God intends for humankind. This is the future that God wants us to imagine. This is the future that God wants us to hope and aim for. The vision is allegorical. What is being described here is a kingdom completely in harmony. There is no divisiveness, rancor, bitterness, or deceit. The needs of each member of the community are met completely in God so there is no competition for resources. It is a world completely opposite this fractured one we live in. As such it is very hard for us to imagine, but we have seen glimpses of it through the life and ministry of Jesus.

It is the pursuit of this vision that Jesus encourages for his followers when he declares in Matthew 6:33, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." In simple terms I see the seeking of God's righteousness as living in a way that is congruent or in harmony with God's desire for humankind, the vision outlined above, not at cross purposes to it. That desire for humankind is an existence where we are in complete harmony with each other and with God; one where there are no longer any barriers between us.

In one sense this is a future hope and in another a present reality. This Kingdom we hope for and live toward exists out there in the future. Yet as we live the way Jesus teaches us, as we follow his commands, as we love others as he loves us, we experience the joy of that future kingdom in our present. As we live for Christ our lives become a kind of lens that focuses the light of this God intended future into our present.

We have a wonderful and amazing future to live for, the Kingdom of God of course, but also a wonderful future in this time as we live out the values of the Kingdom and transform our present world. What does living out the values of the Kingdom look like? It is living in ways that remind people of the Kingdom here and now. It's living in ways that focus Kingdom light into our present circumstances. We do that by engaging in ministries that bring hope, joy, and healing to our communities. We do this by being the hands and feet of Jesus who declared that he came to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, to bring recovery of sight to the blind, and to set free those who are oppressed. (Luke 4:18, Isaiah 61: 1)

As we do this, we draw closer to that day when "the lion will lie down with the lamb" and "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord". We don't have to give in to the despair that seems so much of our world. We don't have to shrug our shoulders and declare that there's nothing to be done about the state of the world. We are honored and privileged to be a part of Jesus' work in the world that will make our present dreams a reality and transform our world and our communities into something reflecting the joy of God's Kingdom, the Peaceable Kingdom of Isaiah 11.

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