

Announcements and an Encouraging Word for October 11, 2023

The Harvest Festival is THIS SATURDAY!!!! Please join us for all the fun!! Bring the kiddos early for the Fire Department Presentation around 9:45am. If you have any questions, please contact me at the office. If you pre-ordered soup and/or apple dumplings you can pick them up at the Festival between 9 and 2.

We are preparing for our celebration of All Saints Sunday on November 5th. If you have lost someone dear to you over the past year and would like them remembered during the worship service that day, please contact the church office with details. Our email address is mtcarmel21122@gmail.com or you can call Mon – Wed 9-2pm. We would also like to share a picture which you can forward to the church as well. Then please plan to be present when that person is remembered.

SAVE THE DATE ALERT!! MCUMC and MCCDC will be presenting a Nativity Play Dinner Theater on Wednesday, December 20!!! Keep an eye out for additional information in the future.

It is time for the Outreach Annual Autumn Food Drive to benefit the Pasadena Food Pantry (formerly the Soup Kitchen). We are starting a little early this year due to the very empty shelves at the Pantry. The Food Bank is doing a good job of supplying frozen meat and some staples but not enough to fill one bag. The Pantry must purchase or depend on donations for the rest.

There have been approximately 100 families served each month since June at this location. One of the new families explained that they started coming to the pantry because during the Covid Pandemic their family received \$250 per month in food stamps. Federal funding has been cut and they are now receiving \$25 per month to feed their family. It doesn't matter how you feel about food stamps, you can't feed a family on \$25.

We will be asking for certain items each month through November so you can help stock the shelves. For the remainder of **October, we are asking for pasta products and canned soups.** You can bring your donations to church and place them in the box in the narthex. Please keep in mind that the Seventh Day Adventist do not eat nor distribute pork products when choosing soups. The Outreach Committee thanks you for your help with this local mission.

Are you following the church on social media? If not, you should! Our Facebook account is <https://www.facebook.com/mtcarmelumcconnection/> 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

"Do not envy the violent or choose any of their ways. For the Lord detests the perverse but takes the upright into his confidence" ([Prov. 3:31-32](#)).

Saturday morning, we awoke to the horrendous news of a deadly surprise attack by Hamas upon Jewish settlements bordering the Gaza Strip. Hundreds of innocent civilians, women, children, and the elderly were killed. Others were grabbed off the streets and taken hostage. Missiles were fired from southern Jordan into Israel who returned missile fire. Once again, through the questionable blessing of live news broadcasts we witnessed explosions, billowing clouds of smoke, gun sight footage of targets being destroyed, cowering civilians trying to simply find safety, and hawkish vitriolic declarations demanding unrestrained response.

I was filled with a flood of conflicting emotions; righteous anger toward those who would callously target civilians without warning; despair that once again that tormented part of the world is plunged into violence and war, frustration that no amount of negotiation seems to be able to settle their perennial conflict, and grief for the loss and death borne by both sides. I find myself drifting in the confusing space between hawk and dove. Part of me feels that violent response to this terrorist attack is justified, yet I know that such a response will only escalate the violence and cause further suffering. I yearn for that day when all people "will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore." Yet I know that day has not arrived and that we live in a fallen world where true monsters exist and must be dealt with. As Christians where should we stand as we witness this carnage? How can we care for our spirits as once again we face what is obviously evil?

This terrorist attack is yet another violent act that will likely reignite a war that has spanned decades. We may be wondering why God would allow it. The first thing we need to understand is that wars are ours, not Gods. Human conflicts are ours, they are not of God. Our wars and conflicts cannot be fought in God's name, though many are and this one is no exception. Wars originate in human pride and arrogance. They arise out of ancient or newly founded hatreds and prejudices – human failings. They are re-enactments of Cain and Abel, and we know how God responded to that – not favorably. To make war and conflict holy is to demean God to our human level making God less than what we know God to be.

It is true that our Old Testament is filled with examples of God's use of war and conflict. However, in those instance's war was initiated by God as retribution for faithlessness. It was never initiated by

someone claiming to speak for God. In the Old Testament wars were God's prerogative – no one else's. Through the lens of Jesus, we find that the violence of war is not what God wants for human beings. Rather we are encouraged to forgive, to turn the other cheek rather than strike back. When someone takes our shirt, we are told to give our coat as well. We are led to be peacemakers. In the Lord's prayer we are taught to forgive as we would want to be forgiven. We also pray that God's will be done and in Jesus' teachings we are taught that God's will is not war but shalom (peace) for everyone. War is not our prerogative, but peace is.

Yet this is not the garden of Eden, nor is it yet the Kingdom. We live in a fallen world and the consequences of sin are evident all around us; war and violence being one of them. Keeping all that I've observed above in mind, yet recognizing we live in a fallen world where war is always a possibility, we must be reluctantly yet steadfastly prepared to meet violence waged against us with strength of arms. We must also always pray that those arms need not be deployed and seek peaceful resolution.

So how should we respond to acts of terrorism or protracted wars when they erupt into our world? We need to recognize this for what it is - a reminder of our human sin and fallenness and seek forgiveness for those hatreds and prejudices that lead to or would perpetuate war. We must always pray for peace – as a very wise person once told me, "Its hard to strike out with a fist if it is folded in prayer to God". Prayer will align our hearts with the peaceful intention of God. We need to pray for the innocent victims of war and be prepared to go to their aid. We need to remember that war grieves God and that we need to join God in that grief and always seek healing, forgiveness, and peace.

So, this is how I'm responding to this new war – now declared by Israel in response to Hamas attacks. It's a reality check reminding me that in a fallen world we must always seek peace but be prepared to respond when the peace is violated. I'm reminded that especially now we must seek to love our enemies and pray for our persecutors. I'm moved to self-examination seeking those destructive emotions and views within myself that would respond with violence and anger, taking them to God, and seeking healing and forgiveness. I'm led to pray for God's shalom to descend on that war torn region of our world and to pray for the innocent victims asking for their healing, restoration, and peace. I'm renewed in my hope and expectation of the day when, "He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore." (Isaiah 2:4)

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