

DEVOTIONS -- Monday 3-16-20:

GOD IS BIGGER THAN CORONAVIRUS – NO FEAR!!!!

Friends --- it has been quite the week!

The President declares a state of NATIONAL EMERGENCY – the Governor closes all public schools and parks – travel restrictions --- financial chaos & economic upheaval ---- countries on 'lock-down' --- and sports events, church services and virtually every sort of public gathering are being postponed, rescheduled or cancelled.....

AND --- unbelievably --- the biggest problem --- TOILET PAPER!!!! ☺ WOW!!!

BUT --- GOD IS BIGGER THAN the CORONAVIRUS --- we have nothing to fear ...

So DO NOT FEAR, for **I AM WITH YOU**; DO NOT BE DISMAYED, for **I AM YOUR GOD**. I WILL STRENGTHEN YOU AND HELP YOU; I WILL UPHOLD YOU WITH MY RIGHTEOUS RIGHT-HAND. (Isaiah 41:10)

1st – WE WANT TO BE PRACTICAL, MINDFUL & COMPASSIONATE: We need to respect and respond to the guidance and direction of health officials and those who know more than we do ... we need to do 'all the stuff'. Friends, we DID NOT CANCEL OUR CHURCH SERVICE for 3/15 and 3/22 BECAUSE WE ARE FEARFUL!!!!

We cancelled our church services because of the COMMUNITY'S COMMITMENT & BELIEF TO A CONCEPT CALLED "SOCIAL DISTANCING."

1. We want to support our community's effort and commitment. Schools are closed --- we want to be supportive, recognizing and SHARING together --- canceling Sunday's service was recognizing and compassionate. Cancelling church yesterday was CONSIDERATE & RESPECTFUL --- NOT FEARFUL!
2. We want to support our health professionals and the health system that supports our community. The term that is being used is "flatten the curve" --- we want to help delay and spread out what seems to be an inevitable spread of the coronavirus virus. We do not want to disregard the mandates and directions for groups of 250 or larger --- if, even one person in our gathering may be infected --- then, potentially, 250+ have been exposed --- our hospitals cannot bear an influx of this number of cases spread throughout the community all at once --- anything we can do to help slow the community spread --- is being respectful and kind and considering of the health professionals that are already working extended hours with limited resources --- to cancel church yesterday --- was CONSIDERATE & RESPECTFUL --- NOT FEARFUL!
3. We want to be practical, kind and considerate to one another --- there are many in our congregation that are more vulnerable than others ---- we do not want to pose a risk to their exposure and compromise because of our insistence to worship God in congregation. Of course, Hebrews 10:25 encourages us to 'not give up meeting together' and THERE ARE DYNAMICS and SPIRITUAL PRESENCE THAT OCCUR WHEN WE GATHER AND WORSHIP IN CONGREGATION --- BUT --- through personal time and time with our closest friends --- we can still encourage one another WITHOUT RISK TO SOME OF OUR OWN WHO ARE MOST VULNERABLE ---- we will be worshipping together in congregation soon enough --- I am hoping and planning for 3/29. In the meantime, God is faithful and will sustain and strengthen those

who seek Him in daily times of prayer, reflection and time given to helping & encouraging one another. To cancel church yesterday was CONSIDERATE & RESPECTFUL of OTHERS --- NOT FEARFUL!

Now --- toilet paper DOES NOT OFFER SPECIAL PROTECTION AGAINST THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS --- and it is NOT ONE OF LIFE'S MOST BASIC STAPLES NEEDED FOR SURVIVAL --- so WHY ARE PEOPLE BUYING UP AND HOARDING TOILET PAPER?

Let's move from being PRACTICAL TO BEING PRAYERFUL!!!!

DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT, BUT PRAY ABOUT IT!!!!

Paul writes, "Do not be anxious about ANYTHING, BUT IN EVERY SITUATION, BY PRAYERS AND SHARING OUR CONCERNS, WITH THANKSGIVING, PRESENT YOUR REQUESTS TO GOD. AND THE PEACE OF GOD, WHICH TRANSCENDS ALL UNDERSTANDING, WILL GUARD YOUR HEARTS AND YOUR MINDS IN CHRIST JESUS." (Philippians 4:6-7)

Friends, DESPITE THE GROWING CONCERN OVER THE CORONAVIRUS --- THERE ARE REASONS TO HAVE HOPE ...

God is powerful and faithful, especially to His children --- He will be with us and not leave us nor let us go. (Deuteronomy 31:6; Joshua 1:8-10; and many more)

While we hear the negative statistics --- over 100,000 people have recovered from the illness!

Let's pray for our leaders and decision makers And let's not be afraid --- we must CHOOSE & DECIDE to FIND OUR FUTURE IN THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD'S PROVISIONS AND ENABLING.

ROMANS 8:37-39 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Dear God, PLEASE help us to be mindful of all the health care workers, people who work retail ... and all of those working their best to help control, treat, and help us through this National Emergency. We affirm that our trust is in you --- that you will give us all we need to do all that we must to survive and thrive --- ONE DAY AT A TIME ... we pray for and commit our families; friends, community and those we care --- for those WHOM YOU CARE. In Jesus' Name, AMEN

DEVOTIONS – Tuesday 3-17-20 Matthew 14:22-32

Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

²⁷ But immediately **Jesus said** to them: "**Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.**"

²⁸ "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

²⁹ “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “**Lord, save me!**” ³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” ³² And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³ Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Friends, as I have come to know Jesus more and more personally --- the more that I am comforted and strengthened by his very presence in my life.

Jesus is always:

1. Inviting us to step out of the boat of our fears and foibles --- Jesus says to us, as he said to Peter, “COME” --- will you come to Jesus when he calls your name?
2. When Peter took his eyes off of Jesus, he began to sink into the overwhelming waves of the storm – I encourage you to keep your eyes upon Jesus rather than the storm. Keeping our eyes on Jesus will:
 - + keep us calmer and better able to think and respond ----
 - + help us to have creative and practical ideas --- and inspirations
 - + help us maintain a perspective that is healthy, practical and balanced ---
 - + help us to lead, encourage and calm our families and those who depend upon us ---

I encourage you to KEEP LOOKING TO JESUS FOR YOUR GUIDING VOICE AND GUIDING LIGHT.

3. When Peter began to sink -- Jesus reached DOWN and LIFTED HIM UP. All Peter had to do was say, “**Lord save me.**”

I encourage you to ask Jesus to “help me --- save me” ... and he will lift you up so that you may think and act better than you’re able without Jesus’ hand lifting you up.

God has given you the ability and the freedom to ACT --- without FEAR --- but with FAITH ...

KEEP YOUR EYES UPON JESUS!

F --- FACE your fears with FAITH

E --- EXAMINE your assumptions in light of the facts

A --- ATTACK your fears with ACTION & FAITHFUL obedience

R --- RELEASE your cares to God.

Dear God, please help me to keep my eyes upon you. I trust you to pick me up when I ask you for your divine help. With my eyes upon you, I believe that I can withstand the storms of life and the uncertainties that swirl around ... THANK YOU JESUS FOR CARING FOR ME AND HELPING ME TO BE A BETTER PERSON WITH YOUR HELP. In Jesus’ Name, AMEN.

DEVOTIONS -- Wednesday 3/18

When I sat down at my computer Tuesday morning, I was intending to write and share a few more reflections regarding Peter's courage and faith to STEP OUT OF THE BOAT (Matthew 14:25-33) --- but THEN God moved my mind and thoughts to David & Goliath (1 Samuel 17).

I'd encourage you to read all of 1 Samuel 17 if you have the time. However, the two verses:

1 Samuel 17:32 "David said to Saul, "Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant, David, will go and fight him."

1 Samuel 17:47 "All those gathered here will know that it is NOT by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's..."

1. DO NOT LOSE HEART --- DO NOT FEAR (Isaiah 41:10)
2. God put it in David's heart to be PRACTICAL and PROACTIVE --- there was a looming giant that needed to be faced. Practically, the giant needed to be taken down. David was all prayed up. David believed that God would enable him and provide for him – DAVID BELIEVED (from past experience) THAT GOD WILL GIVE HIM ALL THAT HE NEEDED TO DO ALL THAT GOD SET BEFORE DAVID TO ACCOMPLISH.
3. God will provide the stones that we need to overcome the giants in our lives --- The events of this past week have us all reeling --- and the consequences of all of the actions, even more --- from finances to child care and buying enough food and supplies to make it through 2 weeks or more with limited access. CALMLY THANK GOD FOR GIVING US WHAT WE MOST ESSENTIALLY NEED --- AND THEN ASK GOD FOR THE CALMNESS AND CLARITY OF MIND TO SEE GOD'S PROVISION FOR EACH OF US.
4. DAVID CLAIMED GOD'S ENABLING AND RELIED UPON GOD WITH FAITH ---
5. DAVID LOOKED FOR WHAT HE COULD DO TO HELP THE CAUSE --- and GOD PUT IT IN HIS HEART TO STEP FORWARD --- I encourage you to be willing to STEP FORWARD AND TO HELP SOMEONE OR SOME SITUATION THAT IS IN YOUR SPHERE OF INFLUENCE --- GOD MAY BE SETTING BEFORE YOU AN OPPORTUNITY TO STAND TALL AND TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

I and the leaders of the church are praying for each of our church members more than normal. We're working on ways to make sure that everyone's needs will be met. We're working to find a way to better communicate with more of our congregation. We're looking for ways to serve and help. AND we're trusting God that there will be enough resources coming into the church so that the work of SHUMC may not only be maintained but may grow in this time of need for our members and our community. PLEASE JOIN WITH US IN THESE PRAYERS AND MAY EACH OF US "STEP UP" AS GOD MAY LEAD AND AS THE SITUATION & NEEDS REQUIRE --- GOD IS FAITHFUL AND GOD WILL HELP US TO DO ALL THAT WE NEED TO DO AND BE.

Dear God, we feel that there are some giants breathing down our necks ... of course we pray for the battle against COVID-19 and pray for all of those medical personnel and all the others that are actively engaged --- we also pray for each of us --- that for each, are facing new challenges, doubts

and even fears. We trust you God --- we need you God --- and we want to STAND-UP and do our part, as you would ordain. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 John 4:4 "The one who is IN YOU is GREATER THAN THE ONE WHO IS IN THE WORLD"!

DEVOTIONS -- Thursday, 3-19-20 (JOHN 9:1-11)

Greetings --- I miss seeing everyone. We're working quickly to add video and audio capacities to the church's ministries, services and support. We posted an audio devotional today on Sermon Net intended to be a mid-week devotional that will generally be available on Wednesdays and will compliment that day's written devotions available on the APP and the website. We even started a new Facebook Page that we pray will allow us to essentially stream a short service, perhaps as early as 3/29/20 😊

John 9:1-11 – Jesus Heals the Man Born Blind---As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "***but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.***" ⁴As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵While I am in the world, **I am the light of the world.**" ⁶After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. ⁷"Go," he told him, "**wash in the Pool of Siloam**" (this word means "Sent"). **So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.** ⁸His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man." ¹⁰"**How then were your eyes opened?**" they asked. ¹¹He replied, "**The man they call Jesus** made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see."

Now for today's reflection:

In the first century, the culture generally associated a person's success with blessings from God and their challenges as punishments from God. THIS IS NOT GOOD THEOLOGY!

Bad things do happen to good people. Yes, we often bear the consequences of our bad decisions and the decisions of those around us. But we also must bear the consequences of living in an imperfect time and an imperfect world.

The Bible tells us that one day, when Jesus Christ comes again that ALL THINGS WILL BE MADE RIGHT (Revelation 21 & 22) BUT in the meantime, we persevere and work through the consequences of this world.

We and the planet must live through and experience the consequences of a broken world --- sickness, disease, death, violence, natural disasters, selfishness, destructive behaviors and so much more...

The man that was born blind suffered such a consequence in the form of his blindness. It was not his sin nor his parent's sin ... the disciples were asking Jesus the wrong question.

I believe the question that should have been asked was, **'WHAT CAN GOD DO IN A BROKEN SITUATION TO SET THINGS RIGHT – TO HELP MAKE THINGS BETTER – AND TO MITIGATE THE CASCADE of CONSEQUENCES?'**

God uses bad situations for good. In this case, Jesus enacted God's healing grace as a miracle that was used to reveal God's goodness, God's ways, God's provisions and God's care – not only to the blind man, but to all of those who witnessed the event.

Many came to believe in Jesus as a result ... and some, particularly the religious establishment, chose to deny God rather than celebrate and cooperate with God's gracious intervention.

My encouragement to us today is to ask:

HOW MIGHT GOD USE THESE TRYING TIMES TO REVEAL HIS GOODNESS AND HIS CARE?

HOW MIGHT WE SHARE IN THIS INTENTION? And

WHAT CAN WE DO TO USE OUR CURRENT CRISIS FOR SOMETHING GOOD?

AND FOR A WAY TO DEMONSTRATE GOD'S CARE TO OTHERS?

It seems that too often, we need to live through the consequences of such time. Good people are not exempt from life's challenges, evils or difficulties.

HOWEVER, God does help us --- sometimes miraculously as in today's text, BUT MORE OFTEN through the hard work, sacrifice, caring spirit of our brothers and sisters --- our neighbors – and our community.

Jesus shared the love of God and chose to intervene in a miraculous healing so that God may redeem and restore a bad situation.

My encouragement to you today is this ---I do not believe that God caused COVID19 but rather as a part of this imperfect world, we are seeing a terrifying virus run out-of-control.

But, this time will pass ... and when it is over,

WILL YOU, WILL WE, HAVE BEEN an AGENT OF GOD'S LOVE AND ENCOURAGEMENT?

WILL OTHERS SEE THE CHARACTER OF GOD IN US AND THROUGH US?

My prayer is that we might do our part, with God's help, to make the world a better place, ESPECIALLY in this challenging and overwhelming time.

LET's work together to be the hands and feet of Jesus ... helping one another and helping our community to face, work through and overcome ... **SO THAT they may know and experience God more fully.**

Dear God, I pray for your goodness to be revealed and that your church be faithful to helping the world be a better place, especially in these trying times. May we help the world to know and experience your enabling care. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DEVOTIONS Friday, 3-20-20 The 23rd Psalm; Isaiah 41:10 & Romans 31-39

As we approach the weekend, I'd like to re-center our thoughts upon 3 Scriptures that we are familiar with and that God often uses to remind us that HE IS WITH US and that HE IS WATCHING OVER US.

As we go through challenges, hardships, and things that are like "the valley of the shadow of death" I want to remind us that God can and will use all things for the overall good of those who love him (Romans 8:28).

Psalm 23 is one of the dearest passages of the Bible. This beautiful poem about God and his people speaks directly to the joys and fears of ANY HUMAN BEING. It is a beautiful reminder that God is caring and compassionate. It also reminds us that, like sheep, we depend on God's care and provision --- EVERY DAY!

Psalms 23

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want

He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters,

He restore my soul.

He guides me along the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me;

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me (even) in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely your goodness and mercy (love) will follow me all the days of my life, and I WILL DWELL in the house of the LORD forever.

Thank you God for being our GREAT SHEPHERD!

What metaphors would you use to describe God's presence and help in your life?

Isaiah 41:10

So DO NOT FEAR, for I AM WITH YOU

DO NOT BE DISMAYED, for I AM YOUR GOD

I WILL STRENGTHEN YOU and HELP YOU

I WILL HOLD YOU WITH MY RIGHTEOUS RIGHT HAND

Reminding ourselves that God is with us and that God helps us and holds us gives me a sense of calm, control and even opportunity.

We are sometimes allowed to enter difficult times SO THAT we might be present to help someone else at a critical junction in their life and need.

Dear God, help me to look beyond my own needs and my own fears SO THAT I might see and respond to those near me that need a calming reminder of Your love and care for them. Thank you God -- IN JESUS VICTORIOUS NAME, AMEN

AND ONE OF MY FAVORITE PASSAGES FROM ROMANS 8:

Romans 8:31-39

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? **If God is for us, who can be against us?** ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. **Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.** ³

⁵ Who (or what) shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

³⁷ NO! In all these things **we are more than conquerors** through him who loved us. ³⁸ For **I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,** ³⁹ **neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

To conclude today's reflections --- These three passages from the Bible remind us and affirm to us that GOD IS WILD ABOUT YOU! Regardless of the hardships and the challenges that swirl around us --- God will work to sustain us and helps us to get through whatever we must --- and in the process, God has given us strength SO THAT we might help those that need help along the way.

Dear God, you are my rock and my refuge --- the GREAT SHEPHERD --- who is always with us --- and who makes us "more than conquerors" -- THANK YOU. But God, there are times that we feel fragile and overwhelmed, please reassure me of Your presence and care. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen