

SERMON JUNE 13
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
HACKETTSTOWN

It is indeed a privilege and pleasure to again see all my friends here at the *First Presbyterian Church of Hackettstown*. Much has transpired since last I saw you all.

To begin, on February 1, 2020, I formally retired as chaplain at the House of the Good Shepherd after 12 years of ministry there. At first, I was sad in leaving, but quickly realized what a blessing it was with the onset of Covid 19. God certainly guided me in the right direction on that one.

Since December 2019 I personally have lost 3 former students and 3 dear colleagues of mine ironically none to covid- just terrible, premature losses. 6 of my friends did get covid, thankfully all survived.

Like many of you, I too was in lockdown. Afraid to venture out, buying as many masks, hand sanitizers and constantly on the quest to find gold.... That was Lysol spray!

My 2 dogs and kitty were thrilled to have me home. We'd go on daily walks. I can honestly say I now speak fluent dog & cat language now!

I have been working on a special project, a collection of words of wisdom from the letters of St. Paul. Hopefully, I shall get them published sometime in the near future.

The entire world has been and in vast parts continues to be thrust into chaos and despair.

Here in this country, we have suffered the needless loss of over 600,000 Americans. People lost their jobs, some even their homes. Families were forced apart. Our educational system was turned upside down and inside out. Our economy tanked.

We survived a bitter election and insurrection that sadly continues to sow doubt and divide us. Doubt and fear *seemed* to overcome hope and confidence----

Yet, here we are today, worshiping together in person or from home. With more people choosing to be vaccinated, doubt and fear *is* being replaced with *hope and optimism*.

Life is slowly but surely returning to “*normal*” though we still have a way to go we must all strive to reach that goal post together and respectful of one another.

The pandemic has taught us many lessons:

It has taught us the true value of cherishing our family and friends.

It has taught us the importance of not taking anything for granted--- not even toilet paper. 😊

It has taught us about who *real heroes are*: doctors, nurses, hospital workers and first responders who put their lives on the line in order to save others and were there to comfort and hold the hands of the dying since their families could not be there.

It taught us the meaning of a simple hug. To see a grandchild, to attend a birthday, wedding or graduation.

Indeed, it feels we have been the gift of embarking on a new chapter in our lives- a renewal – an Epiphany of sorts.

In today's scripture lesson, St. Paul reminds us that “we walk by faith, not by sight.”

He continues, “For the *love of Christ urges us on*”, for by walking in faith and love of Christ will continue to sustain and nourish us. (Something we so desperately need and require today.)

Love & faith feeds our souls, it enables us to ponder and reflect of this great mystery we call life.

Love and faith urge us to explore and appreciate the goodness of all that God has created, both human and in nature.

As Paul states, “there is a *new* creation: everything old has passed away: *see everything has become new*”

(Hold up the record) or in other words, “Everything old has become new again.”

(Remember one of these? Guess what, it’s new again!

Go to Barnes & Noble it will cost anywhere from \$ 20-25 Dollars! But then you have to find something decent to play it on!)

So then, let us begin anew.

Let us agree to disagree at times, always treating each other with respect, honesty, mercy, and most importantly, *love*.

Though we may face more daunting and challenging times, let us allow God to take us where we need to be.

The bottom line is, trust in God and he will not abandon in you.

I conclude with the words of my favorite saint, Francis of Assisi.

“Remember when you leave this earth, you take nothing that you have received- but only what you have been given: a full heart, enriched by honest service, love, sacrifice, and courage.”

AMEN