

## MID-WEEK MESSAGE

Pine Bluffs United Methodist Church April 14, 2020

What a joy it was to share our Drive-In Easter Sunday worship with all of you!! I felt so blessed that we were able to facilitate it with Sonja Fornstrom, Bret Steger, and Dave Crouse from High West Energy, Pastor Norm, Pastor Dan and Joleen Marquardt. It was definitely a group effort and it happened!!! When the sunshine bathed us in its warmth during the service I was so moved because it seemed as if the Son was blessing us in our worship. Then of course when the snow storm commenced again after we got safely home it was like WOW! Thank you, Lord, for your presence in our worship and in our lives!!

Our scripture for today is Genesis 17:1-8. *When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."*

In a message titled "Quick Shifts and Unexpected Gifts from COVID-19" Rebekah Simon-Peter begins with a picture of a diamond shaped traffic sign glinting in the sun and it reads "BLESSING IN DISGUISE". She writes: "COVID-19 has brought with it a flurry of unexpected changes. One month ago, I never would have expected to wear a mask to the grocery store, practice social distancing or wash my hands incessantly. Life has changed dramatically.

There is an upside, though. Even as people have rapidly incorporated unwelcome habits into their lives, the church has been unexpectedly gifted by the pandemic. It's true. The pandemic has managed to kill off some mindsets that no longer serve the church. Many of these shifts, decades in the making, happened seemingly overnight.

### **Pre-Pandemic Mindset: We've never done it that way before**

Do you know the seven last words of the church? "We've never done it that way before." These words of resistance have slowed or stopped many needed changes in congregational life. Those seven words were a sign that tradition had once again triumphed over risk.

With the **rapid onset of the coronavirus**, however, and the changes it necessitated congregations quickly became aware that the pre-pandemic mindset simply wouldn't do. To continue resisting change would mean nothing less than abandoning the church.

### **Mid-Pandemic Mindset: Whatever it takes to stay together**

As church doors shut to slow contagion, congregations took on practices they had resisted for years. Most congregations never dreamed they would launch online worship services, Facebook live, or Zoom Bible studies in a matter of hours or days. Yet, fueled by a deep desire to maintain the church body, congregations adopted a new mindset, "We'll do whatever it takes to stay together."

As congregations quickly moved online, they found something rather surprising.

Worship attendance has grown, not shrunk. The frail and infirm can now worship without having to brave weather, roads, or inaccessible sanctuaries. Visitors can pop in and out at will, fairly anonymously. The curious can try new forms and

styles of services with little risk.

A quick shift for us was the drive-in Easter worship service at the Community Center. I would never have anticipated doing a service like that but the COVID-19 virus has pushed us out of our comfort zones and into serving in a new way. Yes, we had never even dreamed of an Easter service like that but we were so fortunate that we could worship together again. I've missed all of you and I know you are feeling the same. So we came together in a new way, our mind-set adjusted to what was possible and we were blessed.

Abram and Sarai were blessed as well when they followed the call of God into an unknown future. Along the way God made a covenant with this couple and as a sign of that covenant, changed their names. It signified an important shift in their connection. God is calling us into an unknown future but what we know is this—He is with us, traveling before us, beside us and behind us but always present in this unknown!!! Thanks be to God for his abundant love, mercy and grace.

Another leap of faith is happening this week and I would like to give you a heads up about it. We have ordered equipment from High West Energy to set up a live-streaming service for us here at the church. We hope to have it operational, one way or the other, by this Sunday. However, I am on a steep learning curve here and I won't know until Friday or Saturday if it will actually happen this soon. I don't know how it works but Dave has promised he will help us figure it all out!!

So I will keep you posted and as soon as I know something for sure we will send out emails to all of you!!

*Please pray with me. Creator God, Loving God, you have made a covenant with us to be your people and that you will be our God. We face the unknown and uncertainty with the certain knowledge that this is true. After celebrating the Risen Christ on this past Easter we are filled with the joy of the Resurrection of our Lord and the certainty of your love for us in the sacrifice Your Son made for us. As we look for blessings in the midst of the pandemic, open our eyes and our hearts to the new ways you are calling us to be your people. Help us not to give in to our fears and anxieties but to focus instead on Your presence in our lives, guiding us and loving us with a love that will never fail us. In the name of the Christ who loves us so. Amen and amen.*