

SALEM UNITED
CHURCH OF CHRIST

CHAPEL CHIMES NEWSLETTER

"Sharing faith, lifting up, reaching out and growing together."

NOVEMBER 2020

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

FIRST NOTES

In last month's issue of the *Chapel Chimes,* I wrote that cases of the virus were spiking in Sheboygan County, and what the next weeks would look like would be anyone's guess. Well, we have a better idea, now. In that short period of time our area has become a hotspot for cases of the virus. Due to the urgings of folks in the wider church and the recommendations of county health officials, we have dialed back on in-person worship for the short-term. That development shouldn't have come as a great shock: when we opened up in-person worship in August we suspected that there might come a time when conditions might warrant a temporary retreat to online worship services, only. When conditions improve, I anticipate a return to in-person worship.

Then the whole business of the virus stopped being just a news story in our household. In early October, we were all sickened with the virus and we all tested positive for it. Fortunately, none of us had symptoms that couldn't be treated at home and we are on our way to healing. We are all out of quarantine and (at this writing) I am easing myself into a return to my duties.

The encounter with a virus that has been a news story for the past few months has given me cause for some reflection. First, I am grateful for the prayers and well-wishes offered up on behalf of our family; I value those more than you know. Second, I realize that our experience with the virus is not the same experience that everyone has with it. Even within our household, there was a variety of symptoms and severity of symptoms. Third, I have looked at the way that people react to the virus and the threat that it poses.

What has struck me the most in the past few weeks is the level of fear and panic that so many people have over the virus. Don't get me wrong: I understand the desire to take seriously a virus that has contributed to the death of over 200,000 Americans. While the vast majority of people survive it without serious, lasting effects, there are people who do not. I believe that people should be prudent and take the virus seriously. That said, I don't believe that anyone is well-served by being filled with fear and panic over it, either. Fear does not better equip us to face our challenges, nor does it improve the clarity of our thoughts and actions. Prolonged fearfulness can damage our physical and mental well-being.

Furthermore, living in fear runs contrary to the spirit of gospel. Jesus offers the exhortation or encouragement "do not fear" a good number of times in scripture—and for good reason. God will never desert us or forsake us, and God is sovereign. We are not alone. My home church extensively used the old Heidelberg Catechism, and some of you of a certain vintage might remember that catechism, as well. The first question in the catechism was this: "What is thy only comfort in life and in death?" Over 45 years later, I can still remember the first part of the answer: "That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ..."

We should avoid living in fearfulness.

It is my hope and prayer that we all come to the end of this next month in good health and strong spirits.

Like so many celebrations this year, our celebration of Thanksgiving will be different, as well. For the first time in a number of years we will not be doing a community service with First Congregational UCC: we will be on our own for a live-stream worship service at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, November 25th. I will direct you to Marsha's article regarding the pie event, that will be connected to the worship service. The freewill offering for the pie event will be going to the Plymouth Food Pantry. I believe that singing the hymn, "Now Thank We All Our God" will have special meaning this year, and I believe that we have much to be thankful for.

Sunday, November 29th marks the First Sunday of Advent and we will be doing a series based on the Lectionary texts in Hebrew Scripture entitled, "Looking Forward in Hope." The texts and themes for the Sundays of Advent are, as follows: November 29th – "Impatiently Waiting for God" (Isaiah 64:1-9); December 6th --"Comfort for the Distressed" (Isaiah 40:1-11); December 13th --"God's Servant Brings Hope" (Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11); December 20th --"Unexpected Promises" (2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16).

How exactly the events of the next few weeks will play out are anyone's guess. We trust in the power of the Sovereign God to sustain us in all of it.

Until next month.

Shalom aleichem—Peace be with you.

Rev. Jim Hoppert

Lectionary Readings

Sunday, November 1, 2020
Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost

Hebrew Scripture: Joshua 3:7-17
Psalm: Psalm 107:1-7, 33-37
Epistle: 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13
Gospel: Matthew 23:1-12

Sunday, November 8, 2020
Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost

Hebrew Scripture: Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25
Psalm: Psalm 78:1-7
Epistle: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Gospel: Matthew 25:1-13

Sunday, November 15, 2020
Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Hebrew Scripture: Judges 4:1-7
Psalm: Psalm 123
Epistle: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
Gospel: Matthew 25:14-20

Sunday, November 22, 2020
Reign of Christ

Hebrew Scripture: Ezekiel 34:11-16
Psalm: Psalm 100
Epistle: Ephesians 1:15-23
Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46

Thursday, November 26, 2020
Thanksgiving

Hebrew Scripture: Deuteronomy 8:7-18
Psalm: Psalm 65
Epistle: 2 Corinthians 9:6-15
Gospel: Luke 17:11-19

Sunday, November 29, 2020
First Sunday of Advent

Hebrew Scripture: Isaiah 64:1-9
Psalm: Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19
Epistle: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Gospel: Mark 13:24-37