Pastor’s Ponderings

DIS-GRACE

Sometimes it seems you just can’t win.

As I prepared to preach on Luke 1, I was struck by Elizabeth’s response to becoming pregnant with John the Baptist. As an older woman, presumed to be barren, “How kind the Lord is!” she exclaimed, “He has taken away my disgrace of having no children.” (Luke 1:25). At the other end of the chronological spectrum, young Mary is pregnant with Jesus. Matthew describes Joseph's situation with these words: "Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly." (Matthew 1:19).

I continue to be intrigued by the use of the word "disgrace". Mary's character is questioned at being pregnant so early and out of wedlock, and Elizabeth was looked down upon for being childless so late in life. I am comforted to know that living in God's grace is not a matter of meeting human expectations but rather by being obedient to God's call and willing to wait on the Lord's timing. In this respect, both Mary and Elizabeth were living in God's grace.

One more reference to disgrace is found in Acts 5:41: "The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus." I pray that I might be available to God's call upon my life and always willing to serve the Lord whenever and wherever asked, without regard for what the world will think of me. Thank you, Mary; thank you, Elizabeth; thank you, Apostles for modeling faithful living in spite of the world's expectations.

This devotion was first posted on my blog, which can be found at www.nicodemus3719.org You are invited to visit this site each week for a new reflection.

One Verse (or actually 2!)

I want to invite you to join me in memorizing one verse (actually, 2 verses) of scripture which have the potential to give direction to ministry in the coming year 2021. We will conclude each worship service and many other gatherings with these words:  

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. Hebrews 13:15-16 NIV

I will seek out opportunities through the year to share the background of this passage as well as how I believe we are being led in ministry by these words.

I do hope you will join me in memorizing this passage, and it is my intention that we will recipe the words and claim their truth together in 2021.

Sermon Series

I have begun to preach through the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts during 2021! Both Biblical texts come from the same author, and studying them straight through will give us a clear picture of how the ministry of the 1st century church flows out of Jesus' life on earth. In February, we will be reflecting upon Luke chapters 6 to 9. If all goes well, we will finish Luke in the middle of June and then begin Acts.

Digital Ministry Team

I am looking for volunteers to be a part of our new Digital Ministry initiative. It is time to take the next step and be proactive with our efforts to reach beyond the walls of our church building with the message of the Gospel.

We have done well adding a livestream option to our Sunday Service - but there is more we can do. Please let me know if you would like to help plan for the future by enhancing our physical church ministry through means of social media and other digital platforms.

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“Where the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Power of the Holy Spirit converge to change hearts and lives.”
Please note: Committee meetings and activities continue online during the pandemic. Please contact your committee chair for more information.

February Birthdays

1 Jennifer Sygiel
3 Sam Appleton, Jim Lee
6 Len Duncan
8 Rick Gregoire
12 Joyce Emslie
13 Sue Beatty, Dick Robinson
15 Joan Duncan
16 Lori Cartwright
17 Raymond Nickou
18 Charlotte Rispoli
19 Madelyn Caruso, Pam Johnson
20 Paige Machnicz
25 Heather Mazzucco

February Anniversaries

13 John & Carolyn Flynn
19 Ro & Dick Robinson
27 Charlie & Pat Steeves

NEWSLETTER DEADLINE
The 20th of every month - please send articles to Lori Cartwright at loriahlcart@gmail.com

Missed a Sunday? Unable to attend worship?
You can catch the weekly sermon video at www.umcbranford.org

KEEP UP-TO-DATE WITH WHAT’S HAPPENING AT UMCB:

www.facebook.com/umcbranford
https://twitter.com/UMCBranford

Also check out:
www.facebook.com/unitedmethodistchurch
www.facebook.com/umcgeneralconference
www.facebook.com/NYACUMC

“Where the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Power of the Holy Spirit converge to change hearts and lives.”
Ministries of Prayer & Care

As we continue to navigate through the changes in ministry in light of the pandemic, I am constantly looking for new ways that we can "be the church." In the coming weeks, I would like to establish Ministries of Prayer and Care.

Would you be interested in attending a virtual Prayer Meeting? Please contact Pastor Kent by text message or phone call at 845-522-1233 or by email at umcbpastor@gmail.com. We will schedule a time (or multiple times) to gather virtually for sharing joys and concerns and praying for the needs of our church, community & the world.

It is essential during this time that we engage in new ways of keeping in touch with one another. If you would be willing to make phone calls as part of a Care Ministry, please contact Pastor Kent by phone or email. Each volunteer will be assigned 3 to 4 families to keep in touch with on a monthly basis. Volunteers will also share with Pastor Kent any joys or concerns they become aware of.

Please know that you are always welcome to contact Pastor Kent directly if you have any needs or information you would like to share.

Blessings,

Pastor Kent

Tackle hunger! The annual event is going contact-free this year, with a canned soup collection in the church’s parking lot on Saturday, Feb. 6 from 11AM to 2PM. Volunteers will take your donations right from your trunk – and in return, we’ll send you home with a delicious bowl of chili!

Swing by the goalpost, where we’ll have a soup pot for each of the two teams (Go, Chiefs! Go, Buccaneers!) playing in Super Bowl LV, and help us predict the winner by placing a monetary donation in your favorite team’s pot! The “winner” will be announced on the church’s Facebook page on the day of the big game.

All proceeds from the collections will benefit local food pantries.

Other Virtual Programming

We very much want to stay connected with the children during this time of uncertainty and social distancing. A Virtual Children’s Message will be held at 10:15 AM on Sundays. Join us by using this Webex link:

https://meetingsamer11.webex.com/meetingsamer11/j.php?MTID=m75cb92901b41a7f67fbccfacfa45537d

Do you miss chatting and catching up with your UMC, Branford community? We do, too! After the Sunday morning service, grab a cup of joe and a snack, then join a Virtual Coffee Hour at 10:30am via Zoom Video Conferencing! Join via computer:

https://zoom.us/j/99520821843
Meeting ID: 995 2082 1843
Or join by phone: 1-929-205-6099
WORLD DAY OF PRAYER
“Build a Strong Foundation” by the Country of Vanuatu • Friday, March 5 at noon

Please join us for a World Day of Prayer on Friday, March 5, 2021 at noon. This event will be virtual on YouTube and can be reached through the St. George Church website: www.stgeorgeguilford.org. World Day of Prayer is a global ecumenical movement led by Christian women who welcome all to join in prayer and action for peace and justice on the first Friday of March. The women participating in the program this year are from St. Stephen’s AME Zion Church in Branford, United Methodist Church in Branford, St. Pio of Pietrelcina Catholic Church in East Haven, St. John Bosco Catholic Church in Branford, the Bahai Community of Old Saybrook, Deep River Baptist Church, and St. George Catholic Church in Guilford.

Each year, a different country serves as the writer of the World Day of prayer worship service, interpreting the Bible in their own context and lifting up issues of mission, justice and peace that are important to them. This year, the women of Vanuatu call us to worship with the words, “Build on a strong foundation,” inspired by Matthew 7:24-27. We are invited to learn about Vanuatu’s history and culture through music, stories, traditions, and experiences of God’s profound love.

Offerings are collected each year to share with women and children around the world. Where the offering goes is determined by the WDP (World Day of Prayer) national committee. We welcome all donations. Your donation can be made out to WDP USA or St. George Church and sent to St. George Church, 33 Whitfield St., Guilford CT 06437 to the attention of Sr. Kathleen Lynch. All the money collected will be sent to the committee. Thank you, and God bless you!

Ministry While Practicing Social Distancing

PASTORAL CARE: Please know that Pastor Kent is available for Pastoral Care “visits” either by telephone or individual Zoom meetings. If you would like to be in conversation to help process an issue you are dealing with or just to “catch up,” please text or email Pastor Kent to arrange a meeting.

MEETINGS: Our committee meetings will be meeting via Zoom. Please go to www.zoom.us and click “Sign Up. It’s Free” to create your account.

All committee members will automatically be sent an invitation to their meetings. If you would like to receive an invitation to join a meeting, please contact Pastor Kent ahead of time so you can receive the log-in information.

FINANCES: Your weekly offerings may be placed in the Offering Box at the entrance to the sanctuary or mailed to the church office if you are not attending in-person worship. Please consider using our online giving platform by clicking the “Give Now” button on the church website at www.UMCBranford.org

COMMUNICATION: The church office is open from 9am-2pm Tuesday through Thursday. In the interest of social distancing, we are asking that you DO NOT visit the church office during those hours. If you must be in the office, please be sure to be wearing a mask. You are welcome to call the church office during these times if there is church information that Brenda can help you with.

Monday Morning Quarterbacking

An opportunity to dig deeper into the Sunday Sermon! Pastor Kent shares additional insight into the scriptures and the participants are encouraged to ask questions and share reflections on the material which was preached. Please consider attending on a weekly basis or occasionally as the Spirit moves. During the quarantine, we will be meeting by Conference Call at 10:10 am. Please dial in at 425-436-6385 using access code 841200#.
Small Study Groups

Our Tuesday 7pm and Thursday 10:10am Study Groups continue to meet online. Please email Pastor Kent for a Zoom link or telephone number if you would like to join the Tuesday evening study. The Thursday morning group is meeting via conference call. Please call 425-436-6385 and use access code 841200#

7 Men and 7 Women and the Secret of Their Greatness by Eric Metaxas

Meet 14 heroic individuals who changed the course of history! Combining his two popular books into one volume, Metaxas explores the qualities that make a person great. Discover the captivating stories of Mother Teresa, martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer, abolitionist William Wilberforce, Corrie ten Boom, athlete Jackie Robinson, civil rights figure Rosa Parks, and many others.

After discussing the introductions to both books, we will alternate our readings by studying one of the men, then one of the women, etc.

Food Pantry Needs

We continue to collect food to deliver to the local Food Pantry. Non-perishable items like tuna fish, cereal, rice, peanut butter, jelly, soup, macaroni, and sauce are very much needed, as are personal care items like diaper wipes, soap, and toothpaste.

Donations can be left in the green bin located at the entrance to the church.

Are you following Learn & Play on Facebook? It’s a great way to see what our young students are up to! "Like" their page at (or just search their name):
https://www.facebook.com/Learn-Play-Christian-Early-Learning-Center-864205240297632

Here’s a sampling of posts from January.

January 22
As our Kindness week comes to a close, we are reminded of how so very blessed we are to care for these little ones. Each of our classrooms were assigned a special color to wear today for our Fun Friday theme. Although we may be separated by classroom, together we make a beautiful rainbow! As Maya Angelou once said “be the rainbow in someone else’s cloud”. Don’t forget to spread kindness everywhere you go!

January 18
As we celebrate Martin Luther King Jr Day, our friends at Learn & Play are reminded by this week’s theme that you are never too young to spread love & show acceptance. Our theme for this week is Kindness - this lesson is one of the most important concepts that we can teach children. We encourage parents to speak with their little ones about the importance of showing love, acceptance, & kindness to all!

January 15
A sneak peek at some of our winter themed crafts & activities this week!
Pastor Kent invites anyone who’s interested to join him on the 2nd Tuesday of every month to help with Diaper Bank distribution at the Community Dining Room in Branford. Volunteers distribute diapers to registered recipients from 5:30-6:30 PM. He would love to have company!!

Learn more about the Diaper Bank at: https://www.thediaperbank.org

Blessing Bags

Thanks once again to a generous response from our congregation, we were able to put together 18 Blessing Bags to give to those less fortunate.

One way of getting these Blessing Bags to you is through the drive through Community Dinner on Friday, February 26 pm. Please think about taking one of these bags to give to some in need. At the same time, come to the drive-through to pick up a delicious meal for you - or possibly bring to someone else. Win-Win!!

May the Lord Bless you and give you His peace.

UMC Scholarships

One of the major obstacles to students who are preparing for their calling at a college or university is a lack of financial resources. The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry administers numerous low-interest loans and scholarships for United Methodist students in the US.

Explore the GBHEM scholarships page to find more information on eligibility, available scholarships, application process, grants and fellowships, and other FAQs.

https://www.gbhem.org/loans-scholarships/

Scholarship Application Deadline: March 24

RMD: An Alternative Giving Method

In past years, I have reminded those of us age 72+ of the benefits of donating to UMC Branford directly from IRAs as part of the RMD [Required Minimum Distribution]. In 2020 things are different - you are not required to make an RMD, but a contribution may still be made from your IRA. You do not increase your income while making a contribution, and you bypass state tax on the contribution. It’s quick and easy, and you pay less taxes than if you received your RMD and then wrote a check to the church.

As an aside, it’s not too late to do some legacy planning and include UMC Branford in your final requests.

Thank you to John Beatty for providing this information which may be an opportunity for some members of our congregation.
**Sewing For God**

Gayle and I will be working on quilts for our friends at Artis. Currently, we have about 10 tops completed and are working on more. Going to have a layering party soon! Until we can meet again, keep the faith.

*Rosemary*

**Women’s Monthly Luncheon**

Ladies, I’m sorry to say that due to Church regulations regarding Covid 19, no monthly luncheons until further notice. Please note that I am thinking of each of you every month and miss our time together. Stay safe until we meet again.

Questions? Please call me (Rosemary) at (203) 589-1620.

**KEEP SAVING YOUR SODA CAN TABS!**

Please continue to collect your tabs and place them in the green bin outside of church. It would be nice to start the New Year with another Ronald McDonald House drop. Every tab makes a difference, just like you do!

As always, we thank you for your support in this great cause.

*Rosemary & Tony*

**Secret Pals 2021**

Is it February already? Where did the time go? If I haven’t called you to confirm who your Secret Pal is for 2021, please give me a ring. As a reminder, you have the same person as last year.

Keep the faith that one day soon we will get together as a group and share hugs and love again.

*Rosemary*

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*CaptionCall: A no-cost solution for seniors, veterans, and others with hearing loss.*

Do you or someone you know ever have trouble hearing or understanding on the phone? Many seniors, veterans, and others experience difficulty hearing on the phone. CaptionCall provides a no-cost solution with a home phone and mobile CaptionCall app for iPhone.

With the current “safe at home” orders, it is important for anyone with hearing loss to stay in contact with family and friends, and have reliable access to emergency services. CaptionCall ensures accurate communication and the ability to save important captioned calls (i.e. doctor appointments, lab results, names, phone numbers, addresses).

There is no cost for the installation of the phone or the ongoing captioning service. The program is made possible by the American with Disabilities Act and is 100% funded by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

To learn more about CaptionCall or to request your own no-cost captioning phone, call/text/email David Wells at (203) 871-7393 or gdavid3@yahoo.com.