

Newsletter Reflections for May

Mays usually are transition months; from spring to summer. This May it seems we are on the threshold of more than one transition. This May still finds us in the season of Easter on our church calendar; still awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost on May 23rd. This year we are also still trying to deal with the abrupt changes in our world, both physical and psychological which happened a little over a year ago, hoping to transition back to some other reality. Most of us just want to totally forget 2020 and those events; the changes they made. We don't have very many good memories of the events which occurred during that time period. Just before Holy Week 2020, the reality of the pandemic came to the United States with the rising death toll. We began, or at least some of us, began to realize that our world was going to have to deal with that virus and change how we live because it. Now in 2021, change is again on the horizon with the roll out of vaccines. But the question becomes what kind of change do we wish to take shape? Many just voice a call for a return to what was before...a return to that "normal" because their lives were fine. But "normal" ...whatever that was...that previous "normal" for a good many people was not really fine for everyone. The events of 2020 exposed some very ugly things about us as a society; some things that we really already knew but were able to ignore because...well, because those things did not impact our lives. Then some of those people who lived that "normal" began dying in the largest numbers and were found to be "essential" to those who lived the other "normal" after all...those folks who did the cleaning...the picking of the farm products in the fields...those folks who worked retail for those very low wages and had to work more than one job in order to barely sustain their families...were needed by those folks who were living those very comfortable lives. Yes, that virus began to uncover some very ugly facts about the way our society was working for some and not for others. The question then becomes...can we go back to "not knowing"...or that state of pretending that we didn't know that "normal" really isn't all that good for some people? If we truly claim to follow that one whose life and ministry, whose death and resurrection we just celebrated as life giving, can we ignore his teaching and calls to love and care for others? During this year the church as an institution also had to change...had to deal...had to question itself...and had to rediscover that it was not a building but the people who came together to follow and witness to the teaching of a man who walked among us some two thousand years ago with a message about a different way of living which promised life abundant for all...not just prosperity for some. So as we collectively and individually move through 2021 we need to take time to consider what time of "normal" to we wish to shape for ourselves in the future. Thinking about how we want to use our voice about shaping what the new normal should be brings to mind some thoughts about our church. Presbyterian Churches are connectional churches, not single units or congregations. This means that we believe that we gather not only as individual congregations to worship and witness, but that we join with others to strengthen that witness to the world. The national church, PC(USA), through their work to witness have developed a program called Matthew 25. This program developed by the Presbyterian Mission Agency was begun several years ago. Our Presbytery has joined the

movement, declaring that it is committed to working to become a Matthew 25 Presbytery. The Presbytery is encouraging individual congregations to also do this as a statement of witness and commitment to the gospel. The purpose as stated is “Presbyterians joyfully engaging in God’s mission for the transformation of the world.” The purpose is a call for members to be actively engaged in their communities and working toward the aims found in Matthew 25:31-46; known as the judgement of the Nations passage. There are three areas listed for emphasis for churches which include working on issues of poverty, racial injustice and church vitality. The Session is considering this matter. At the moment Olney works on alleviating hunger and giving aid to a Title 3 school. We do not have large programming efforts, however, I think it just as important to be willing to join as a witness; to testify to the truth of the Matthew 25 passage, even if unable to individually create programming on all fronts or aspects. Whether or not Olney becomes a Matthew 25 church, as members of this community, of this world, we do have a voice to raise about what type of society will be formed out of the “unlocking” which happens as we move out of the pandemic, what type of “normal” will be created. The pattern for a new normal based on Matthew 25 where we see Jesus’ face in all people would be a wonderful witness and testimony to have take root in our society. Each Sunday we lift a prayer asking that God’s reign to come closer to earth, working to expand the treatment of others as those in whom we see the image of our Lord as depicted in Matthew 25 would be a way toward that goal.

Shalom,

Pastor Libby