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October 23, 2008

Posted by revrandy - 2008/10/23 17:31

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Hi Folks!

May this day bring you peace, prosperity and an extra helping of God's comfort and love!

This is a time of year when I get a little overwhelmed by what is happening around me. With an election and economic woes added to the mix, this year is especially difficult. I feel we are traveling down a whitewater river, having to keep track of the people in the boat, the speed of the river, the rocks, the currents and the direction in which we are aimed. This is surely a time for multi-tasking.

I have some recommendations regarding our collective work together and our journey to all of the good things God has prepared for us. Some are events that will help us grasp what is ahead. Some are thoughts about where God is taking us. Some are just musings of a pastor who believes the voices of negativism and disunity are far more dangerous than the economic times or political candidates.

First, some things we can do. Our events calendar is very full right now. Saturday's "Trunk of Treats" (4-6:30pm) in the church parking lot will be a fun time for families and anyone who wants to come, open up their car trunk and give to the trunk-or-treaters who will come in costume to have a great time. Sunday's 10th Anniversary (one service at 10:30am, lunch to follow) with Millard Fuller founder of Habitat for Humanity and Neysa Wilkins, anchor of Channel 7 in Panama City (she will sing for us) will be a great time of looking back and forward. On Thursday Dr. Maxie Dunnam will be at Niceville 1st UMC to tell us about the status of the United Methodist Church and what is happening in our denomination(everyone can come). On Sunday November 2nd we will begin a new Parent's Morning Bible Study (10:00am in the Pre-School area) using Dr. Kevin Leman's material "Raising Rock Solid Kids in a Pleasure-Driven World." On Monday, November 3rd our annual Charge Conference (our annual church-wide business meeting) will be held. And on Thursday, November 6th at 9:15am we will begin a new Exercise Class in the Green Room in the Youth and Children's Center. Whew! In the midst of national emergencies and elections, our church life goes on in a big way.

Lastly, I just have a few comments about our tendency to get negative, divisive and dissenting in these times of great turmoil. I shared, a few weeks ago, that Jesus' final prayer was one concerned about our unity (so we should hold unity as a very high virtue in the Church). Galatians 5:19-21 takes this a step further. Paul rightfully places the sins of quarreling, dissension and division among other sins like sexual immorality. You might ask why Paul uses this grouping? We must remember that we "grade" sins as humans but God does not see sins on a sliding scale of better or worse. They are all separation from God. But in this passage Paul is especially concerned with sin that has an adverse impact on both the sinner and on others close to the sinner (the collateral damage from the sin). At times of difficulty God's people are to be seen as those who rise above and make the world better. In the Church Christians are to put away their petty differences and bind together to find solutions and harmony. For it is in difficult times that we can "shine our light before people so that our Father in heaven is given glory." And this "shining" needs to happen in both our "public" life (with people who are casual associates) and in our "private" lives when we are with our closest friends and family. These are the moments and times when we teach others what it is about to be a Christian. And that teaching starts at home with those we love the most.

So let's stand together in the unity of Christ. Let's work out solutions for our Church that follow Christ to a better place. Let's share and give as God has shown us. Let's love those who are hard to love. Let's live life in abundance, for our abundance is not in the world but in the things of God. Let's be those who allow God to change us and make a difference in our world.

Next week we will begin a three-week journey. It will be our annual Gratitude Campaign called "Changing Lives for God." The title says it all. We are about making a difference in the lives of people so that God is glorified in all we do. You will be challenged. You will hear testimony. You will hear teaching that will stretch you. And, I pray, you will be better at the end of the journey than when you began. And remember, you don't journey alone. We are all seeking to go out into the world for Christ, gathering together ourselves and others in His name, growing in knowledge about His plan for us, giving of our time/energy/prayers/service/resources, all to glorify God. I am honored to walk beside you!

In Christ's Love, Randy

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