

The Circuit Rider

MONTVILLE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

29 Whitehall Road, Towaco, New Jersey 07082

Office - 973-334-1603/Pastor's Cell - 973-771-9511

E-mail: pastordonaldk44@gmail.com

Website: www.montvilleumc.org

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MONTVILLE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

STAFF

Lay Leaders	Tammy Martone Linda Anderson
Circuit Rider Editor	Lois Whitman
Director of Music	Joe Zelman
Deacon	Rev. Laurie Zelman
Pastor	Donald Kirschner
Youth Leader	Karen Ausland



Pastor's Message

Our Golden Ticket to a Land of Chocolate

Sitting in a clothing bin separate from my dresser (since it's rarely worn) is a purple t-shirt that says, "Think Positive." The quote is from a song in Roald Dahl's "Willy Wonka," a musical I had the privilege of performing in during my junior year of high school. It was the first time I had a somewhat big role, playing Mr. Bucket, Charlie Bucket's dad. At one point in the musical, Mr. Bucket, sitting on a bench with his hat in his hands, down on his luck, says, "Be positive? Why?" To which his son replies, "Why not?"

From this interaction then begins my favorite song in the entire musical, on which my purple t-shirt is based. The song turns into a duet toward the end, but for the opening, involves positive Charlie trying to encourage and convince his pessimistic dad as to why thinking positive would be really good for him: *You've nothing to lose so why not choose to think positive? Whenever my luck is on the blink, I think positive! Whenever I'm feeling down and out and don't know what to do, I never give way to fear and doubt, 'cos thinking positive sees me through!*

If a child, a friend, or a complete stranger came up to you in the midst of any sadness or discouragement you were experiencing and started singing or expressing the above, how

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convinced would you be by their message? Do you more often find yourself being like optimistic Charlie or pessimistic Mr. Bucket? Do you feel you might be a little of both at times?

Growing up, I always considered myself an optimist, the kind of guy who always looked at the bright side of things and saw the glass as half full. My optimism was such that, even during my first marathon, my goal was to keep a smile on my face the entire time, which made for a lot of surprised spectators toward the last leg and riled up their cheers all the more. I'd say I'm still more optimistic than pessimistic, but there's definitely a level of pessimism that has entered in. And if I run a marathon, much as I love running, I'm usually not smiling the whole way through. The same goes for painful or difficult experiences that come my way. Having joy in the midst of all circumstances, or even harder, counting all trials and difficulties as joy, as James calls us to, becomes a great challenge (James 1:2). And it's certainly not as easy to do when, over the years, we grow less innocent, become increasingly jaded, and are more well-versed in the school of hard knocks.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shaped our landscape in numerous respects and has impacted us in many ways that I believe we are not yet fully aware of. I recently attended a two-part session with other clergy called "Landscape of Loss," helping us to name some of the losses experienced in our new landscape, and to also discover resilience as a bit of a balm of Gilead for ourselves. Many people were optimistic about how long we'd be in the midst of "new normals" or how soon we'd be back to "the way things used to be." But many soon became less hopeful, and, 11 months in, that hope continues to wane among people everywhere, even as glimmers of positivity are present with the rolling out of the long-awaited vaccine.

Hopelessness is said to be one the greatest enemies of resiliency, resiliency being the

thing that keeps us moving forward no matter how hard things get, endurance that moves us forward no matter how long or how difficult the race before us ends up being. And hope is one of the seven leading causes of life (yes, you heard me right. I encourage you to look it up: "The 7 Leading Causes of Life." For it's a far better read than "The 7 Leading Causes of Death"!). A lack of hope is what led to Mr. Bucket's struggle when hardships and difficult circumstances came his way, and a lack of hope is often what leads people to be drowned in their sorrows, rather than rising above the losses they've endured, whatever those losses may be, for we know that loss can be experienced in all sorts of ways.

I've been reflecting recently on an image given to us in Jeremiah 17:8, which talks about a tree that is green, bearing fruit even in the midst of a drought and in the face of any fear or anxiety that comes its way. I encourage you to take time to read this verse and reflect on it for your own life. It's referring to those who wait on the LORD, or those who trust in the LORD.

I wonder if thinking positive, being optimistic when things are darkest and difficult, can do things like that for us, helping us to be rooted trees planted by streams of water. But more than thinking positive might be able to see us through, I wonder how God, as we trust and wait on the LORD, will help to see us through? Following James' charge to count all things joy, he says that the testing of our faith produces endurance, or perhaps we could say, resiliency. And if we let that resiliency, mixed with hope, have its full effect, then James believes we will be mature and complete, not lacking anything (James 1:3-4).

For the seven weeks of Lent leading up to Easter, we'll be delving into a sermon series called "A Trail Forged by Tears." Through it, we'll explore various Scripture passages that, together, will seem to collect an aqueduct's worth of tears. Whether it's the woman bathing Jesus's feet in tears and wiping them with her hair, God mourning over the humans he created when

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they turned from God toward their wicked ways, the weeping prophet Jeremiah giving a message he did not wish to speak, or Jesus himself at the tomb of Lazarus or in the Garden of Gethsemane, I hope you'll join us for what we believe will be one of the most meaningful and powerful Lenten experiences we've ever had, as we journey toward the cross together, the place from which all our tears flow and find their healing in.

Even though my purple "Think Positive" t-shirt is a little smaller fit than I would like on me at this point in my life, perhaps it's time to pull it back out, even if just symbolically. How convinced are you by my purple t-shirt's message? And would you wear it if you had one? Even if you outgrew it physically, do you think you'd outgrow it figuratively? We're often told how powerful listing our gratitudes or counting our blessings can be. Perhaps embracing optimism and unlearning pessimism can be something that gives us greater resiliency and hope during a time when we have all been tested and tried more than ever. It may just be our golden ticket out of this pandemic and into a land of chocolate beyond our wildest dreams.

So, what do you say? Will you join in the duet with Charlie? For I believe there is yet hope to come: *Whenever you're feeling low or lost, just take a tip from me! You're wasting time to count the cost, 'cos thinking positive, that comes free! That's right! Positive is the way to be! Whenever I'm teetering on the brink, I think positive! The moment I do, I'm in the pink, I think positive! Remember this song when things go wrong, then you'll know what to do! In no time you'll be thinking positive too!*

Full of hope,
Pastor Donald Kirschner

Special Opportunities for Lent

1) Daily Lenten Devotional

Journey with us from February 17th to April 4th (Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday) in a church-wide daily devotional called "Return to the Lord." Devotional books can be picked up from Pastor Donald on Ash Wednesday. They can also be picked up beforehand if you call him at (973) 771-9511 or email him at pastordonaldk44@gmail.com.

2) Ash Wednesday Opportunities

Although we will not be administering ashes in-person this year, we are planning for a special joint Ash Wednesday service online (on Zoom and YouTube) on Wednesday, February 17th at 7:30pm. It will involve communion and be for both Montville UMC and Boonton UMC. On Ash Wednesday, there will also be a special "Burning of the Burdens" in the Montville UMC parking lot at 12 noon, which all are welcome to join. Dressing warmly is highly recommended!

Do you have a burden you're carrying or a confession you'd like to name? If you haven't already mailed them to the church, you can still bring your burdens and/or confessions right before the "Burning of the Burdens" starts, or put them in an envelope with "Attn: For Ash Wed" on the envelope and drop it off to Pastor Donald anytime at the Montville parsonage. Your burdens or confessions won't be read, but they will all be collected and offered to God in this symbolic way.

3) Taking up a Lenten discipline

Lent is a great time to start a new, life-giving spiritual practice or draw closer to Christ through some form of self-denial. Although many feel they've already given up a whole lot more than they expected with the pandemic, we invite you to consider how God might be calling you to use this coming season as a means of drawing closer to Christ. What are those things you can't seem to live without that might be worth severing ties

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from for a time: Is it coffee? Hot showers? Social Media? Dessert? Meat? Is it listening to music in the car? Watching TV? Caring too much about what other people think of you? Or what might you consider taking up as a meaningful practice: Journaling? Writing encouraging letters? Engaging in intentional silence? Being more self-compassionate? Affirming others? Having a habitual quiet time? Whatever you give up or take up, we pray it will be a meaningful experience for you!

4) Small Group Opportunities on Zoom

Thursday Evenings: The path that led Jesus to the cross and the story told from Genesis onward is a path often paved by tears. Starting February 25th, join us each Thursday evening at 7 pm on Zoom for a Lenten small group in conjunction with our Sunday sermon series for Lent: "A Trail Forged by Tears." This group will not have a book to go through. All you need to do is bring yourself and get ready for a meaningful discussion!

Tuesday Mornings: Things have been messy this past year. But, this Lent, we invite everyone to look at their messes through the eyes of Christ. Starting February 23rd, join us Tuesday mornings at 10 am on Zoom as we journey through a book called, "Restored: Finding Redemption in Our Mess." Books are not required for participation, but books for \$12 can be picked up from Pastor Donald on Ash Wednesday or at a separate time. They can also be purchased on Cokesbury if you didn't sign-up for one in advance.

Continue to Worship Virtually with Us!

As announced the last Sundays in January, we are completely virtual for Sunday worship for the entire month of February as well. Our regathering and worship team will meet toward the end of February to discuss about March. We invite you to jump on Zoom or go to our

YouTube page each week to join our Sunday worship service at 9:30 am. The link and call-in information for Zoom will still be the same as it has been in the past:

Zoom Link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/8537182720?pwd=bmJLSEhCOGVodzNSU0J2azcvM1QvZz09>

For those calling in to hear the service:

- 1) Dial 1-646-876-9923
- 2) Enter Meeting ID: 853 718 2720 followed by #
- 3) Press # again
- 4) Enter Password: 29626 followed by #

This will also be the Zoom information used for any Lent Small Groups, our Youth Sunday School Class, and Tea & Conversation.

Ashes

Contained within your envelope that had this newsletter was a little packet of ash. We ask you not to mix it with oil or use to impose ashes on yourself, but to simply keep it somewhere special for the entirety of Lent as a meaningful representation of all that Ash Wednesday represents, as we journey to the cross together. And then, at the end of Lent, on Easter Sunday, we invite you to spread your little bag of ash in a garden, a plant bed, a flower pot, or go outside and let the wind take it wherever it leads. Just as Jesus will show that he can rise from the grave, so too can we, with Jesus' help, rise and grow from the ashes of our lives.

Miss Karen's Youth Class

Though we miss our "in person" classes, we are continuing to meet via Zoom on Sundays at 11:00 am. The month of January we touched on Self-Esteem and Being Created in God's Image. I am happy to say that my students took a few different self-esteem assessments and scored quite high. We have some very confident youth. With that being said, let's hope I can talk them into leading a Sunday service sometime in the near future.

We discussed the season of Lent, the symbolism of Ash Wednesday, and we have decided we will all give up something for Lent. Jack and I will give up soda, Richard - pop-tarts, Emmy - hamburgers and Erik - cereal.

For the month of February we will study four great "love stories" - Mary & Joseph, Abraham & Sarah, Ruth & Boaz and Jacob & Rachel.

Congratulations to Erik who won the attendance award for the first quarter of Sunday School.

Children's Sunday School

Love is in the Air

On Wednesday, February 3rd, our Children's Sunday School met for a socially distant gathering in the fellowship hall to make Valentine's cards for the residents of St. Alberts. We also had lots of fun playing Valentine's Bingo together. Thanks to all our volunteers who made this event possible and thank you to all those who participated! We know the Valentine's cards will bring much joy and many smiles to those at St. Albert's. :)

Roof Fund

When we started the church roof fund in 2016 our goal was \$40,000. We expected to have to replace the roof in less than five years. We have been able to repair several leaks to extend the life of the roof with the expectation that the roof project can possibly be done in the spring/summer of 2021.

Now, our most recent estimate is \$45,000 and possibly more if it is determined that the steeple should and can be removed and replaced again after the new roof is done.

But the GOOD NEWS is that the church roof fund total is now \$38,301.30.

Even though the year 2020 has been difficult, our members and friends have been very generous. We received many donations to the church roof fund throughout the year, we received several thousand dollars of donations made to the roof fund supporting Pastor Donald's "pumpkin run", and many donations to the roof fund at Christmas.

God bless all who continue to support Montville United Methodist Church. When making donations for the church roof fund please be sure to identify it accordingly. We pray that you have a healthy, happy, and blessed 2021.

Tea & Conversation

Join us every Thursday at 4pm for an opportunity to connect during a pandemic that often feels so disconnecting. The Zoom information is the same as it is for Sundays.

So, grab your favorite cup, find a good spot on the couch or table, get your computer or phone onto Zoom, and we'll see you then!

Questions?? Reach out to Tammy Martone or Linda Anderson.

Update on Pastor Tom Henion & Ways You Can Help



As we think about Lent and the 40-day wilderness experience we are being invited into during this more somber, but meaningful season as we journey toward the cross of Christ together, we are mindful of a fellow clergy and his family who are going through a wilderness experience of their own. Pastor Tom Henion from the Montville Reformed Church recently underwent a liver transplant, a surgery that can be upwards to half a million dollars, even with insurance. Even though he is home now, he's still occasionally going to Mt. Sinai Hospital in NY each week and has a long road ahead of him to recovery until he's back in action at the church, with many more medical expenses on the horizon.

If there are donations you'd like to give to the Henion family, you can do so by writing a check to our MUMC Pastor's Fund and putting "Pastor Tom" in the memo line. Then we will send one collective check from our church to the Montville Reformed Church with that designation. You can send it directly to Pastor Donald at 29B Whitehall Rd., Towaco, NJ 07082, especially since we're not meeting in person right now for worship. There is currently no way to donate to the cause online, but there may be an online giving option set up by local faith leaders later on down the road, whether through Go Fund Me or RIP Medical Debt.

Written cards, whether they be from children or adults, to show the Henion family our love would be very welcome. Cards of encouragement can be sent to the Henion Family's address at 105 Changebridge Rd., Montville, NJ 07045. People are also welcome to email montref@optonline.net if they want to be given a date to cook or provide a meal for the dinner chain they already have set up for the Henion family.

Whatever ways you choose to show love to the Henion family at this time, we thank you in advance for your support!