

According to Mark . . . May 2017

It's May once again, that season of flowers blooming and trees changing from buds to leaves, as well as time to open the windows, welcome the fresh air and blow away the winter's dust. We have long ago left behind the doldrums of snow and cold in our lives and now celebrate renewal of our gardens, our homes; indeed, our very lives seem to hum with a new Spirit. And it should be that way, right? It's Eastertide, after all, and the Lenten season of suffering is done. It's a time of joy, of leaving the bonds of our old lives behind and being freed into the new life that lies ahead.

If that message sounds familiar, in this column it takes on a more reflective, and at the same time, more promising tone. I will have been with you all three years July 1, and this month we have a meeting to mutually discern my tenure to date and think about all that we have done together on our journey. It's been a busy time! Just think about what's gone on:

We rebuilt our steeple, clock, phone system, belfry, and front porch after being struck by lightning;

We standardized our Bibles to the NRSV from two different versions of the Good News Bible;

We formed a revitalization task force and voted to affirm new outreach into Townsend in ways important to the Town's needs;

We instituted a new 'community dinner' that, with other churches, allows a free meal each week of the year at one of our area churches;

We have undertaken new ecumenical initiatives with St John's to help expand our Christian fellowship and encourage cross-denominational cooperation (Blessing of the Palms, Blessing of the Animals, Youth Group Columbus Day outing);

We have supported and provided exciting curriculums and faith formation initiatives for all our young people ages 3-18 with amazing leadership from Heather Mulrenan and Sarah Goyette;

We have a new energy in our music program under Reneé Fossey and expanded what we do in worship to be a more 'singing church';

We are making a difference in the lives of our young people and families affected by drugs and drug addiction through a new grant awarded with our partners NM Cares and Townsend PD;

We have welcomed in a dozen new members into our faith community and baptized 5 babies!

We have many other things that have happened with us, to us, and through us that have brought us joy, challenges, sorrow, and changes. But through it all, one thing remains: our strength in God's purpose to why we are gathered through Christ's call, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

I came here with an abiding love for the Gospel of John, and for this passage in particular. I firmly believe that we might heal the world starting right here, right now, for the Kingdom of God is not just at hand, but it IS right here ... right now ... in Townsend, in this holy place, with each and all of You, God's gathered people. But it requires that we move ever forward in building our service and love to one another and to our greater community. For it is only through that strength, unity, purpose, and practice of love that we not just demonstrate our faith, but renew and regain it each day.

We will decide on May 21 whether to continue our journey together at the annual congregational meeting. We will decide whether we can commit to what we have begun and do yet more hard work and mighty tasks for such a small gathered people. We will decide our future for years to come, because we need those years to be able to weave the new threads of a binding cloth and prayer shawl which will embody not just our church, but our entire community. We will decide whether healing will not only be possible, or probable, but will start at TCC and radiate through our blessed little corner of Massachusetts. So I invite each of us, each member of the gathered community, to a 'coming home' day in recommitting to a new vision of Congregationalism. One rooted in Community. In Faith. In Healing. In Journeying into an uncertain but exciting future, because we love one another just as Christ loved us. And we don't just say it ... we do it.

Pastor Mark