



First United Methodist Church
504 Jackson St.
Reynoldsville, PA 15851
(814) 653-8593
pastor@fumcreynoldsville.org

April 1, 2020

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This is going to be a strange Easter; an Easter like no other in our lifetimes. No making room for extra folks coming to church; no one dressed up in a pretty new dress; no new Easter bonnets to be shown off (well, come to think of it, maybe we haven't been seeing too many of those in recent years).

As I type these words, it was just minutes ago that we received word from our favorite news sources that Governor Wolf has now extended the "Stay at Home Mandate" to all of Pennsylvania. Another reminder of just how unusual and disconcerting the last few weeks have been and that it is sure to continue for a while.

I greet you with the reminder that, in spite of all of the restrictions, we are still an Easter People! Whether we are all together on a Sunday morning in the same room, or whether we gather in our individual homes for worship and prayer via the internet and Facebook live, or even if we have none of the latest technology but merely an old Bible and a few precious hymns that we learned by heart decades ago, we are still an Easter People! We will pause and pray and read again the story of Jesus' resurrection from the dead with the assurance that this is not just some old legend, but rather the testimony of eyewitnesses to that resurrection, testimony which has been handed on from generation to generation, and which is confirmed again and again as we see for ourselves the difference that God's love poured into the people we love, raising them from the isolation of despair and pain and addiction and brokenness of a living hell, into the joy, hope, strength, gentleness, and generosity of a new life that has been raised with Christ Jesus.

We are an Easter People who don't just know, but who live the truth every day that He Is Risen! He Is Risen Indeed!

While it will be weeks yet before we can all gather again in the beautiful sanctuary and see the light pouring through those amazing stained glass windows, we will continue to gather for worship together online at www.facebook.com/firstumcreynoldsville/ on Sundays at 10:45 am. If you are unable to join us at that time, you may check in at the same Facebook page later and enjoy the recording of our live worship. If you are not a Facebook user, but still have access to a computer, you may also access the recordings of the services at www.fumcreynoldsville.org.

Also, please note that we will celebrate a Community Good Friday worship service together at Noon on April 10th at this same Facebook site: www.facebook.com/firstumcreynoldsville/. Ben Austin, Sam Bundy and I will all be participating in this online expression of community together and we hope you will be able to join us in this way.

We are an Easter People, and that means that whenever it is that we may finally gather together again in the sanctuary on a Sunday morning, it will still be Easter for us, because whenever we gather, it is *always* Easter!

Please remember that the church is still open daily if you feel the need to come and pray or to find some reading material in the church library.

I already am noticing several blessings in the midst of all of the restrictions: first, the governor's list of "Life Sustaining Businesses" *includes* churches and religious organizations! We can and are "staying open, as a resource of life and hope for you and our world even though we are currently practicing social distancing and not gathering in groups larger than 10 at a time.

Furthermore, the response to our livestreaming of worship continues to be encouraging and I am hopeful that we will master all of the necessary technology well enough by the time the restrictions are lifted that this will be a continuing and permanent form of our church's ministry, and that it may even open some new opportunities for our shut-ins and their families to feel more "connected" to the church.

Also, I believe that the necessary precautions may give many the opportunity to deepen their spiritual life and practices by spending a bit more time in prayer, studying scripture, and praying the scriptures. Even as we ramp "down" many other time consuming activities in order to comply with the "Stay At Home Mandate," we can ramp "up" our spiritual activities and practices, learning to be more disciplined followers of Jesus and more authentic reflections of God's love for one another and the world around us.

In all of this, be blessed by God's presence in everything, and know that I am praying for you and am as near as a phone call, a text message, or an email. I'll "see you online," Easter People, for He Is Risen! He Is Risen Indeed!

By His Grace,

Pastor Tom