



Dear Friends,

“Silver bells, Silver bells, it’s Christmas time in the city...” started our High School Assembly at the beginning of December as our driver ed. teacher singing loudly wondered on to stage. It always seemed that he wasn’t supposed to be there, but after three years of the same performance I came to understand that he was. And each year we all went wild, cheering, and clapping and just having fun. I look back now and wonder what it was that was so exciting that got us all going. We were a very diverse school half black and half white, rich - poor, religious - not religious. For most of the year we were truly separated from each other but come this day at that assembly we all cheered, and we were together. It hard to put a finger on what it was that created the comradery, but maybe it was the simply the anticipation of the holiday that was not far away – Christmas.

Well First Presbyterian Church Newark is about to begin the preparation for this amazing day as well. Sunday, November 28, marks the beginning of Advent, one of the most joyful times of the Christian year. Each Sunday in Advent (November 28, December 5, 12, 19) we will be lighting the Advent candles and have special readings as we prepare for our special Christmas Eve service on Friday, December 24 at 7:00pm. Christmas is a time of gift giving to reflect the amazing gift that God gave us when he sent his Son into our world. Our services will be filled with gifts of candle lighting, special readings, favorite Advent and Christmas hymns and carols, music by the choir, bell choir and praise team. It is a time of rejoicing and coming together.

It always amazed me how this holiday would bring our incredibly diverse High School together and I believe we too can do the same! As we come into this time, let us join together to seek the future of this congregation

and as we seek to fulfill the great commission that Jesus gives us in Matthew 28:

*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

Jesus also gives us one commandment in John 13:34:

*That you love one another as I have loved you!*

We are told to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ and salvation to the world around us. Living it in all that we do and at the same time loving each other as Christ loves us. If we cannot stand together how can we hope to be a light to the world, to bring love where there is only brokenness and anger? To bring hope to a world with so little hope? Paul’s words in Philippians 2:12 will be instrumental for as we seek that path that God has set before us:

*Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

Paul does not mean that we need to work for our salvation. Salvation is ours through the one who was born on Christmas day and laid his life down for us on Good Friday. Paul is asking us to take that salvation we have been given and let it grow within us until we are filled with such grace that we can move forward in faith and know that Christ is with us to the end of the age and will guide us to fulfill the joyful task he has set before us.

Are we to do this each by ourselves? Paul does not mean that each of us individually work to show our salvation. Paul never uses the singular you – it is always the plural. Paul is saying to us: **All of you at First Presbyterian Church Newark work together to let the salvation that God has given the whole congregation shine through all that we do.**

Will it be with fear and trembling? It will. Walking in faith is never easy. We live in a world that always wants proof, needs to weigh all possibilities, and want assurance that what we are doing will succeed. It doesn't work that way when you are moving by faith. Abraham and Sarah set off on a journey with having no idea where they were going. They struggled, lost faith, lost their way, had quite a few disasters, but after each wrong turn they turned back to God, and they finally found the promised land. Our journey will be arduous, but joyful. We will make mistakes and hopefully each time we too can turn back to God.

But to make this journey we need to work side by side knowing that it is only when we can stand together supporting each other seeking the future of this congregation that we will complete the mission that we have been given. Change is difficult and leads to uncertainty and fear. The days ahead are growing darker, but the light of Christ is only growing brighter, especially when we put our differences aside and learn to listen to each other respect each other, seek the truth, and know better than to listen to rumors and or create rumors. Let us all work to communicate openly, listen carefully and respectfully and know that this is a very special season and with it the light of this church can grow to become a beacon for the community around us bringing Christ's love as we love each other.

In the light of the Savior,

Pastor Eric



*For*  
UNTO US  
*a child*  
IS BORN, UNTO<sup>U</sup><sub>S</sub>  
*a Son is Given.*  
AND HIS NAME WILL  
*be called Wonderful, Counselor,*  
MIGHTY GOD, THE EVERLASTING FATHER,  
*the Prince of Peace.*  
ISAIAH  
9 VERSE 6