

# MIZPAH MUSINGS



*From Pastor Fran:*

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

One of my great joys since coming to Mizpah has been having the sacred privilege each January of drawing a watchword for our congregation. Drawing a watchword is something that I enter into prayerfully, asking God to guide my hand to the exact right card with the exact right words for our congregation. In asking for God's guidance, I trust that God will provide the words that we most need to hear – words that will inspire us, challenge us, and ultimately draw us closer to our Lord as we seek to follow him and grow as disciples. Each year, God has indeed provided through our watchword just what we need.

While the setting for drawing our watchword this year may have been a bit different – at my desk at home rather than in the pulpit in Mizpah's sanctuary – the process was exactly the same. I offered a prayer asking God to guide my hand to the exact right card with the exact right words for our congregation for 2021. I trusted that God would do just that. God did. Following is Mizpah Moravian Church's watchword for 2021: *It is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and work for his good pleasure. – Philippians 2: 13.* The hymn stanza that accompanies our watchword is from the beautiful old hymn *He Leadeth Me* (787): "He leadeth me: O blessed thought! O words with heav'nly comfort fraught! Whate'er I do, where'er I be, still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me."

The words that we read from Philippians 2: 13 are words that the apostle Paul wrote to his beloved sisters and brothers in faith in the church in Philippi. These words come at the end of a section of his letter that emphasizes unity and humility. Paul wraps up that section by reminding the believers that their salvation comes from God working salvation in their lives – not by anything that they can attain on their own; and he reminds them that it is God, working in and through them, who provides the energy and the fuel for their work – all for God's glory! As we open ourselves for God to work salvation in our lives, God fuels our hearts to pour God's love back out into the world. It is God who does this. It is us who are called to respond to Christ's salvation by sharing our faith in love.

As you ponder and meditate on our watchword today and throughout the year, may the words that the apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians (and to us!), inspire you, challenge you, and draw you near to our Lord and Savior as you seek to follow him and grow in love, service, and discipleship. It has been a joy to seek, follow, and grow in faith with you.

Christ's peace,

Pastor Fran



The next time we celebrate Holy Communion, remember this little known story from the Apollo 11 moon landing: The first thing astronauts Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong did after landing on the Sea of Tranquility was to celebrate communion. "In the one-sixth gravity, the wine curled and gracefully came up the side of the cup. Just before eating the bread and drinking the cup, Aldrin read from the gospel of John: *'I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.'*" Because of a lawsuit brought by an atheist, NASA made the decision to black out that part of the broadcast. Thankfully, it has survived to inspire us all these years later.

## *A Look Back at 2020*

Moses was exhausted. He was 120 years old, he admitted he couldn't get around like he used to, and God had told him he couldn't enter the Promised Land. The events of 2020 have made us all feel a little like Moses. But when Moses spoke to the Israelite nation, he encouraged them with this: "The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." Deuteronomy 31:8 NIV

Mizpah sisters and brothers took Moses's words to heart as we lived out our faith in 2020, knowing that God would never leave us, even in the face of a worldwide pandemic:

We faced closed doors.

***We worshipped outdoors on the lawn. God was honored.***

The weather turned cold.

***We Zoomed. God was there.***

We missed in-person sharing of prayer concerns and answered prayers.

***We emailed to a distribution of over 60. God listened.***

Roofs needed repairs and had for a while.

***Weather forced the issue. God provided.***

The Moravian Day of Service presented the opportunity to give back to our community.

***We hosted a drive-thru food collection benefitting Second Harvest Food Bank. God was blessed.***

Long before plans were finalized, folks were asking if we'd have our fall chicken stew. But how?

***Outside "grab and go" worked just fine. God smiled.***

Plans were being made and monies were being raised to remodel the fellowship hall.

***When we learned of needs within the greater community, our efforts turned to providing food and shelter. God was pleased.***

Our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary merited a big celebration!

***We gathered for hamburgers and hot dogs behind the parsonage. God gathered with us.***

Can we pull together a Drive-thru Nativity in spite of not having done it in years?

***We did indeed, and hundreds came to experience the real meaning of Christmas. God incarnate.***

Angel tree in 2020? Well, we can't put up a tree, but there is real need for a single mother with a fourth-grader at Old Richmond Elementary.

***The call was issued, and Mizpah answered as they always do, and gifts of toys and clothes and gift cards for food were bought and shared. God was proud.***

What would Christmas look like in 2020?

***Lovefeast: Buns ✓ Coffee ✓***

***Candlelight service: "Candles" filled our hearts with light divine ✓***

***Morning Star, O Cheering Sight" ✓***

***God came down.***



We are told to let our light shine, and if it does, we won't need to tell anybody it does. Lighthouses don't fire cannons to call attention to their shining – they just shine. *Dwight L. Moody*