

PASTOR'S PAGE

We are in an in between time as I write this newsletter Pastor's Page (12/17/19). We are between ending one year and beginning a new one ... an "*in between time*". As a pastor, I can say the same about the time between Christmas and the beginning of lent on Ash Wednesday. What I mean in saying this is that I find myself always looking down the road to what is coming next. In the case of Thanksgiving, I begin to set my sites on the Christmas celebration, the midweek Advent services leading up to Christmas, and the worship services held on Christmas Eve. After Christmas and as the New Year begins, I count how many weeks it will be before Ash Wednesday which means thinking about the six week journey of lent and moving into Holy Week, and then to Easter Sunday worship ... in which month does Easter fall in 2020? All pastors, do this ... it's called planning. Of course, planning is good. It better insures that worship and leading the congregation on a spiritual journey will be done well.

But there's a drawback to the anticipatory planning. The drawback is that it always infiltrates the necessary "down-time" that allows us to catch our breath. Another drawback is that it has a tendency to rob us of being present in the moment and appreciating the present day we are living. Jesus said, "*Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own.*" Applying this to planning, I don't think Jesus meant we are not to plan because planning has you focusing on the future too much. I think what he meant is that there is a difference between planning that is relentless and has you constantly oriented toward the future and planning that is responsible so that you are reasonably prepared. For me, I know I can easily slip into a future orientation to the extent that I am absent to the present. This is not good. There is a lot to take in, in a present moment. You can miss a lot when you are too focused on those future moments. Ever talk with a person with whom you can tell they are not listening to you because they are too concerned with what they are going to say next? They miss facial expressions and words that you say and you wonder why they don't understand. Well, we can go through our days like this ... too concerned with what will happen next ... tomorrow, next week, next month, even next year.

The fact is, every day we are in an "*in between time*". This means that ... yes, some planning will inevitably need to be done. But, it also means that we have to be intentional about the present moment too. For it is in the present moment that God speaks to us. If we are too busy thinking about what we are going to do or say next, we most likely will miss what God may be saying to us right now. Churches are always in the midst of "*in between times*". Theologically, we are in between the 1st and second coming of Jesus. Practically speaking, churches are always in between receiving members and members passing away, between old visions of ministry and creating new ones, between pastors coming and pastors going, and the list could go on. All human beings live between the time of their birth and the time of their death. So as the New Year begins, be present to the present moment in which you find yourself ... a moment of transition between one year and the next. And in that present moment of transition, hear what God may be saying to you. In that present moment, be thankful for life. In that present moment, relish the presence of God with you, Emmanuel, God with us. Yes, the spirit of Christmas is always a present moment. God has been with us in the past, is present with us now, and always will be present with us in all the times to come. Pay attention to God's presence in your life ... for it is in the present moment that God speaks.

Trying to stay in the moment, Pastor Rick