

## Pastor Stan's E-pistle Sunday, February 27, 2022

I am back from two weeks of vacation, including a week in south Texas, where the weather was generally warm and sunny. Libby and I were able to visit two couples who have been friends for a long time. Bruce and Carol are staying at an RV park in Mission, Texas, near their son Andrew and his family, and are in the process of making it their winter home. We were able to rent a unit just down the street from theirs and enjoyed having extended time with them, especially in the aftermath of the death of their middle son Shawn last October. The other couple, Mike and Nancy, have a vacation home in Port Isabel, just across the bridge from South Padre Island. We spent two nights with them, including some time at South Padre and shelling at Boca Chica Beach (SpaceX is located there). We then returned to the Mission RV park in time to be with Bruce and Carol and Andrew and his family and to watch the Super Bowl at his house. While we were all disappointed the Bengals lost, we were glad that it was an exciting, well-played game. We enjoyed dining on some delicious Mexican food and Gulf seafood. We spent a day in the border town of Nueva Progreso, Mexico and we went hiking and bicycling at the Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park and World Birding Center, one of the best places in the world for bird-watching.

Our trip home, however, was quite the ordeal and a general illustration of why traveling by airplane is too often a miserable experience. On Tuesday the 15<sup>th</sup> we were booked on a flight from McAllen to Dallas/Ft. Worth, with our connecting flight to Dayton to depart about an hour after landing at DFW. But due to a mechanical problem, the flight from McAllen kept getting delayed, until we could not make our connecting flight to Dayton. An airplane finally did arrive and we got to DFW about 9:30pm, over two hours after the Dayton flight had left. American Airlines put us up in a motel and then we had to get up at 4am to catch a 7am flight to Charlotte (that's a very nice airport, by the way—great food choices), then on to Dayton. So the return trip required two days, four airports, and three airplanes. Is it any wonder why for many people, flying ranks right up there with a root canal in terms of anticipation? Consider this my rant of the week.

I am glad to be back at work and look forward to being with you in worship on Sunday. In anticipation of our gathering, here are some things you need to know:

1. We will be holding our annual meeting this Sunday, immediately following the worship service. Annual reports were distributed last Sunday, and you may wish to bring your copy with you for the meeting. Extra copies will be available for those who have yet to receive one. The meeting will highlight the work of our boards and committees in 2021, include the year-end financial report, and we will also have a memorial for five of our faithful members who departed this life in 2021. I don't expect the meeting to run over 10-15 minutes. I encourage all our members to be present for this important event in the life of every congregation.
2. This Sunday I will begin an 11-part sermon series on the Ten Commandments. This will be an all-church focus for the season of Lent. We are using the book by Adam Hamilton, "Words of Life: Jesus and the Promise of the Ten Commandments Today." I will be leading the Lenten study, which will take place starting this Monday, February 28, at

7pm on Zoom. The Zoom link will be sent out each Monday morning. Sara will lead the children in Sunday school in a study of the Commandments. If you need a copy of the Hamilton book, we have them available. The suggested price is \$20. Or you can order a copy from Amazon at about the same price. The sermon this Sunday will be an introduction to the series, and I will set the stage for the 10 sermons to follow. The title of the sermon is "God's Way for God's People," and the scripture lesson is Exodus 20:1-20.

3. The Lenten study group that starts on Monday will be done via Zoom so that we eliminate concerns about Covid transmission in a small group gathering, and allow a larger number people to participate from home. We will be using the DVD companion to Rev. Hamilton's book. You don't have to read the book to join the study, but it will help, so please pick up a copy on Sunday morning and then read the introduction and first chapter in advance of the meeting.

Can you name all ten of the Ten Commandments? Surveys show that nowadays not many people can. Most people are better able to name the ingredients of a Big Mac or the members of the Brady Bunch than the Ten Commandments. This was not always the case. There was a time in our history when memorizing and reciting the Ten Commandments was a routine part of worship, confirmation classes, and Sunday school. Back in the day, it was common to see plaques of the Ten Commandments hanging in church sanctuaries and Sunday school classrooms. In some liturgical traditions they were recited every Sunday during worship. Most churches have gotten away from this practice, perhaps out of a desire to focus on the New Testament gospel of grace rather than the Old Testament emphasis on law. So it is important to consider what the roll of the Ten Commandments is in today's post-modern, secular world, and how they impact our lives as Christians seeking to follow Jesus of Nazareth. I last preached on the Ten Commandments in 1998, so it is good to revisit them now and make them the focus of our Lenten journey.

4. Speaking of Lent, we will be holding our Ash Wednesday service in the sanctuary next Wednesday, March 2, at 7pm. The imposition of ashes will be part of the service, as we are reminded again of our mortality and dependence upon God's grace. I hope you will join us for this special service that is the beginning of our Lenten journey.
5. Session met on Tuesday and renewed my contract for a second year, starting on March 1. I am grateful for the opportunity to continue to serve with you and look forward to continuing to grow our ministry in Wilmington.
6. Session also made the following revisions to our Covid protocols: The wearing of masks will now be voluntary, with an emphasis on both personal choice and mutual responsibility. Those who have chosen not to receive the highly effective vaccines that have been administered now for over a year to billions of people should continue to wear masks, primarily to protect themselves from Covid. Those with compromised immune systems may wish to do the same. Those who have been fully vaccinated (i.e., received both covid vaccine jabs and been boosted) are free to dispense with the wearing of masks in the church building. Coffee hour will resume on Sunday, March 6. We will continue to receive the offering the way we've been doing it, with the offering plate at the entrance to the

sanctuary. We will continue to hold the Passing of the Peace in a safe, socially distanced way, and we will use pre-packaged Communion elements for at least two more months. Session will revisit the protocols in the light of future covid data, but with the rate of new cases falling dramatically over the last month, it seems that now is an appropriate time for a revision of the protocols.

Might we be seeing the light at the end of the long, dark Covid tunnel? Many experts think we are moving into the time when the pandemic becomes “endemic,” that is, something we live with and work to contain and treat, much like we do with influenza. While I think we still need to be careful, and there are settings where masks should still be worn (airports and airplanes, for example) those of us who are fully vaxxed and boosted can probably begin to be a little more relaxed in situations where we know most other people are also fully vaxxed.

That’s enough for this week’s E-pistle. Thank you for reading it. Don’t hesitate to respond or raise questions if you feel the need.

See you on Sunday. God bless you and yours.

Pastor Stan