



A Message from Rev. Tom Ficklin



Happy Thanksgiving!! As I write this, the house smells amazingly of homemade Chocolate Snowflake cookies. These are my favorite cookies that Linda makes. But be not deceived, the kids will be home this week for Thanksgiving, so I would be naïve to believe all these cookies are all just for me. The truth be told, I have been instructed to stay out of them.... But, these do come right after the homemade Devil's Food cake that she made for my birthday last week. What have I done to deserve all this? Nothing.

Isn't that what is amazing about this time of year, we remember, and hopefully name all of what we are thankful for. God's bounty and grace come to us even when we do not deserve anything. As scripture says, in *1 Peter 1:3-4*, "***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By His great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.***" Thanks be to God!

Some will say it is hard to be thankful in a year of pandemic, but I say, "not so!" Our church has continued in many ministries in spite of being "shut down." Our food ministry found a way to meet the needs of our brothers and sisters, even to the point of providing 50 Thanksgiving meals. When our governments deemed it safer not to meet in person, we stretched into Facebook Live and connected with people we have never met. When we realized that Facebook Live was important to many people, we chose to invest in technology that would allow us to continue to meet their needs.

Internally, many people have increased writing notes and making calls to other members. We have kept the prayer chains going for so many in need, knowing full well that prayers are important to the one praying and the one being prayed for.

As best as is possible, the deacons continued to monitor the spiritual health of the body by meeting, masked and socially distanced to protect our physical health. There was work to be done and our deacons set about doing that work.

The dreams of our meeting on March 14 were put on hold because of the pandemic, but have not been abandoned. Southampton, in spite of the pandemic, has voted to merge into Woodland Heights even as some have noted that our hearts were probably already merged before our heads chose to vote.

The church has not sat idly by and done nothing. We have adapted and been flexible to what could be done for The Kingdom even if it did not look like anything else that we had done in the past. We took Jesus at his word when he said, "Do not be afraid." Well, maybe we were anxious at times, but we took the appropriate risks to keep moving.

And the faithful continued to give. Our budget is a theological statement of what we value. People believed in that statement whether we were meeting face to face or

meeting online. This is another healthy statement about who we are and what we believe and who we trust, especially as we trust one another. Thank God from whom all blessings flow.

However, as good as all that sounds, there were moments of fear and moments of tears and moments of grief, but again, God was in each of those moments also. There is nowhere we have been, individually or congregationally, that God was absent. He loves us too much to leave us.

So, what will 2021 bring our way? I cannot give you the specifics, but I can promise you that God will be fully present in all we do, if we will but let Him. I can promise that He will never leave nor forsake us. Many of you have real life examples of what God has done for you. Just ask any of the Southampton members where they have seen God work over the past few years. You may be amazed at some of the answers you will get. Let your past realities strengthen your future hopes.

Please use this time of Advent, this time of expectant waiting, to do just that, to expect what God has in store for you and for us. Allow Him to prepare your heart and our hearts for all His goodness and mercy and grace. He loves us unconditionally and unlimitedly. He wants the best for us, because when we are working fully in The Kingdom, we are fulfilling His desire for reconciliation and restoration. Who we are and how we act impacts everyone around us. If we are the light that is shining on a hill, others will see the Light of Christ brightly and clearly.

This is a good place to be. This is a good time to be here. I have been blessed to be allowed to be a part of two amazing fellowships that have chosen to become a merged fellowship. As Paul says, in Philippians, ***“I thank my God every time I remember you.”***

What will 2021 hold? I do not know, but I do know that together, you, I, and God, will boldly face the potential opportunities that lie before us. Lord give us eyes to see and the heart to understand!! **“To God be the glory, great things He has done!”**

