

A Message from Rev. Tom Ficklin

Can you believe Advent is finished and we are already halfway through Christmas? The New Year will start in just a few days. It is that time of year where we look back and then we look forward. Here are the questions I think we all need to ask of ourselves, answer for ourselves, and really, to ourselves:

- What is the health status of this human body God has given me to use while I am here on earth?
 - Do I exercise and maintain this great gift I have been given?
 - Do I walk enough, stretch enough, and lift enough?
 - How are my food choices?
 - Do I eat the right things at the same time?
- What is the health status of my mind?
 - How do I choose to fill my mind?
 - What am I reading?
 - What am I watching?
 - How do I choose to speak my mind?
 - What am I saying?
 - Who am I saying it to?
- What is the health status of my spiritual practices?
 - How do I, every day of my life, actively live into:
 - The Greatest Commandments - Matthew 22:36-40 NRSV
 - ³⁶ *“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”* ³⁷ *He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”* ³⁸ *This is the greatest and first commandment.* ³⁹ *And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’* ⁴⁰ *On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”*
 - The Great Commission - Matthew 28:18-20 NRSV
 - ¹⁸ *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.* ¹⁹ *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,* ²⁰ *and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*
 - Do I actively and intentionally read enough scriptures every day?
 - What is God telling me?
 - What do I then do with what God is telling me?
 - What is my role in church based on what I hear from God instead of what I hear from my ego?
 - How is my prayer life?
 - For community?
 - For myself?
 - For church?
 - For Church? (there is a difference!)

- How is my evangelism?
 - Who do I tell about Jesus?
 - How often do I tell people about Jesus?
- How am I doing in building community?
 - Have I walked across the street to meet my neighbor?
 - Have I sat down and eaten with my neighbor?
 - What have I found out I have in common with my neighbor?

These are all tough questions that will take more than a few minutes to answer. I would urge you to commit yourself to a time of reflection before a time of planning so then you are ready to commit to a time of action.

Speaking of times of actions, on March 14 of 2020, we had a time together to write down things that were important to us. Many, including myself, are concerned we may have lost our momentum. As I sit and write this today, I am actually beginning to think that this time of distancing or isolation is actually a time for us to prepare for what comes next. One person even posited that after all this time away, people may actually have more excitement and energy and predisposition to try new things or to try things again. Time will tell.

Time moves fast. January 1, 2021, is my first anniversary with Woodland Heights. In my short tenure, I have tried to convey some things that I believe are immensely important, here and now:

- God loves us each more than we can ever believe or understand.
- God expects us to love everyone around us just like He loves us.
- God expects us to be open and honest and forthright and authentic with everyone.
- God expects us ALL to be active using our gifts in The Kingdom.
- God expects us to be open to His change, which based on our March 14th meeting seems to be telling us to be more entrepreneurial and less controlling, more agile and less rigid, willing to take risks without being afraid of making mistakes.
- God has a plan for this church, here and now.

January 1, 2021 also brings a merger of Southampton Baptist Church into Woodland Heights Baptist Church. Some will tell you that we have been merged for quite some time now, and there is great validity in that line of thought. Some will say it took too long to be formal with the merger, and I can fully understand that line of thought. However, I will also contend that doing the right thing the right way at the right time is also extremely important. Our process in, or “how” we do everything, we do in church is extremely important. “How” churches do so many things is too important to short cut, gloss over, or hide. Churches are to be people of light, not darkness.

But you know I cannot leave you with a statement; there has to be a question. Surveys have shown that most people come to a specific church because a friend invited them.

If you love your church, who have you invited to come?

What is stopping you from asking them to come worship with us?