

Happy New Year...again!

A friend wrote today and said it's time for a "restart restart"...as her New Year's resolve to try restart some good practices is already wearing off. The attendance at my exercise class was further proof that as January turns into February, we lose the momentum, or motivation, to keep up with our best intentions. Another colleague, a Chinese American, wrote today to remind me that it is the Chinese New Year, which I took as a great gift...one more chance for a fresh start.

My Chinese friend also taught me that this is the year of the dragon. Unlike the negative depictions of dragons in European cultures, Chinese dragons are mythical creatures symbolizing many things positive such as good fortune, strength, and righteousness. He shared this wonderful story he learned as a child:

There once was a man who had a reputation for being a lover of dragons. He embroidered dragons on his clothes. He engraved dragons curling up the pillars of his house. He brought stone sculptures of dragons to decorate his garden. One day a real dragon from heaven heard about this dragon lover and decided to pay him a visit. The dragon poked her head through his front door, wrapped her body with the golden scales around the house and stuck her tail through one of the windows. When the dragon lover saw the real dragon, he was terrified. He ran and hid himself trembling with fear. The real dragon was disappointed that this so-called dragon lover only loved the images of dragons and not the real ones.

As Christians, we claim that we love God, we love Jesus, we go to worship and pray "thy Kingdom come..." but I wonder if we're ready for that prayer to be fulfilled? If God's kingdom comes today, how would we react? Would we be ready to embrace the expectations of a God who tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger? Are we really ready to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God? If Jesus rang your doorbell tomorrow, would you be happy to let him in and show him how you are living?

The New Year offers us a chance to do some house cleaning and heart cleansing. In just a few weeks, we begin the season of Lent, where we will take another look at the places where we seek to clean up our act and prepare for God to enter in. It's never too late, or too early, to get started.

With Joy!
Pastor Erica

Special Events in February Worship

- February 5 Souper Bowl Sunday:** collecting food and money for Carty Cupboard
Special Guest Preacher, Rev. Doug Robinson-Johnson, February 5
- February 12 Scouting Sunday:** recognizing past and present Girl and Boy Scouts
Cookies for sale! Special 100th anniversary Girl Scout celebration
- February 19 Transfiguration Sunday:** Special Guest Preacher, Rev. Rick Whitefleet-Smith
- February 22 Ash Wednesday Service** at 7:30 in the sanctuary to begin the season of Lent
- February 26 First Sunday in Lent**



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Epworth Welcomes Boy Scout Troop 54

Boy Scout Troop 54 began meeting in Fellowship Hall on January 17. Come to worship on Scouting Ministry Sunday, February 12, and meet the Scouts and their Leaders.

Founded in 1915, Troop 54 is the oldest active Troop in the Mohegan Council. The Troop is led by Senior Patrol Leader Bowen Keevan under the advisement of Scoutmaster Joshua Froimson. The Troop Committee has been ably chaired by Donald Harris since 1978. Epworth UMC members Keith and Gavin MacNeal have been active in the Troop since 2008.

The Troop meets weekly every month except July. In these meetings, the Scouts prepare for upcoming outdoor events and work on advancement. The Troop goes on at least one overnight camping trip each month throughout the year. About four of these are backpacking trips which provide each Scout with the adventure of living off what he carries. The Troop is currently on an active streak, having had 36 consecutive months with at least one outdoor overnight. During this period, the Troop has camped in every New England state with the exception of Maine. The Troop has a website at www.t54.org where you can see photos and learn more about them.

The Troop is always looking for new members. Boy Scouts is a youth program for boys aged 11-17 with the mission of developing boys into honorable men through fun activities in a safe environment. The aims of the Scouting program are to promote character development, citizenship training and mental and physical fitness. Advancement through a series of ranks provides a series of surmountable obstacles to aid in building self-confidence. Each boy is encouraged to attain the highest rank, Eagle Scout. At least forty-five Scouts have earned their Eagle with Troop 54. The Troop Committee is also interested in starting a Cub Scout program to serve boys in 1st through 5th grade. Interested parents are encouraged to see Keith MacNeal.

The United Methodist Church has a rich history of sponsorship and support of the BSA because many churches have found Scouting to be a successful way to reach and minister to community youth and families. The Leadership of Epworth UMC and Troop 54 are looking forward to a successful relationship.

Scouting Sunday February 12

Our new Boy Scout Troop and members who belong to area Girl Scout troops will participate in worship February 12. As this is the 100th anniversary of Girl Scouts, we will have a special cake and recognition of all women who were Girl Scouts. If you have memorabilia from your time in the scouts, you are invited to bring it that day. All scouts and former scouts are invited to wear their uniforms to Epworth that day.

Youth Basketball

Youth in grades 6-12 are invited to play basketball Friday nights at Wesley UMC, 114 Main St.

WAUM Reactivates

The Worcester Area United Methodists (WAUM) is the organization of laity and clergy from our Worcester United Methodist Churches. Years ago, the "cluster" was formed and given fiduciary responsibility of an endowment to fund shared mission and ministry initiatives. In addition, the group partnered to support the work of each of our churches and to establish connections and build relationships among us. The clergy meet monthly for a covenant group, and the entire WAUM, while rather inactive the past two years, usually meets a few times per year. This week, WAUM holds its first meeting of 2012 with Pastor Erica and Clem and Nancy Farnham representing Epworth. If you have any questions about WAUM, please ask any of our representatives. We will keep you posted of the work and future projects of the group.

Worcester Interfaith Supports Summer Jobs for Youth

Summer jobs for our young people give them an opportunity to learn important skills in leadership, employment, community responsibility, etc., as well as provide many benefits to our cities and towns. Thousands of youth benefit from the leadership and mentoring of summer work programs and the work they do beautifies and improves our communities. The state funding for these programs and jobs has been cut from this year's budget and next year too. We have an opportunity to ask our legislators to reinstate the funding at a special meeting February 13, 6:30-8 p.m. at the Boys and Girls Club in Worcester. We hope to have 200 people attend to show support for our youth and the benefit of all our communities.

Lent Begins Ash Wednesday February 22

Lent is a season of the Christian Year where Christians focus on simple living, prayer, and fasting in order to grow closer to God. It is our tradition to begin this 40-day season on Ash Wednesday, when we prepare our hearts and minds for this special time. We pay particular attention to the life and teaching of Jesus during this season that leads to the events of Holy Week, commemorating Jesus' trial, crucifixion, death and resurrection.

Plan now to attend the Ash Wednesday Service 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, February 22, in the sanctuary.

Lenten daily devotions will be available online at our website, sent to your email, or you can pick up printed materials at the church.