

Back where I grew up, near Syracuse, N.Y. there was always snow this time of year. I could almost depend on waking up each morning to a new blanket of snow gently draped over the countryside. It was as if there was a new world to explore each day. I have wonderful memories of exploring these fresh white new worlds often with my grandfather. We would set out into a winter wonderland to see what surprises the snow had brought. Of course there was a purpose to my grandfather's explorations. There were always things that needed checking. He made maple syrup so one of the things he needed to check was the level of sap in the buckets he had strapped to his maple trees. So even though we were exploring together our paths in the snow often diverged. My grandfather's trail in the snow would be fairly straight going directly from one place to the next. My path would be all over the place diverging from his as I wandered down to the creek and chased off after rabbit tracks or went to investigate the icicles hanging off the fence. As we retraced our path back to the house I remember noticing how grandpa's tracks were straight going directly from one place to the next while mine seemed to meander all over the countryside before always returning to his straight path. There would be places where I could see that grandpa paused on his journey to check on me, or call me back to him.

I think this is a kind of metaphor of our lives under Jesus care. Each day is a journey as we get up, set our feet on the floor, and go out into the world following after our Lord. He sets a straight path; our paths aren't always so straight. We often get sidetracked and our paths often diverge from the one that Jesus would have us follow. We sometimes drift away on side journeys of our own. Sometimes we are distracted by some new event or experience. But

Jesus is always there to call us back to him. There is after all a purpose to our journey with Jesus. It's not a sight seeing trip, there are things that need to be done. But our Lord is patient, and before we get too far away, calls us back to the path.

The most wonderful thing about my snow day walks with grandpa was that I was with him. I don't remember much about all the things I saw or investigated on our walks.

What I do remember is that I was with him. I remember his voice, his laugh, the way he whistled as he walked along. And I think that's probably how it should be with our journeys with Jesus. When we look back on our lives the thing that should stand out the most is that we were with Jesus, Jesus was with us. Everything else may become a dim memory. But that Jesus was with us every step of the way – that's the memory that should stand out. That's the memory we will cherish.

Joy and Peace, Pastor Mike



## MESSAGE FROM THE LAY LEADER (RET)

Grace and peace to you from God the Father,  
and our Lord Jesus Christ.

A Sunday school teacher decided to have her young class memorize one of the most quoted passages in the Bible; Psalm 23. She gave the youngsters a month to learn the verse. Little Rick was excited about the task, but he just couldn't remember the Psalm. After much practice, he could barely get past the first line. On the day that the kids were scheduled to recite Psalm 23 in front of the congregation, Ricky was so nervous. When it was his turn, he stepped up to the microphone and said proudly, "The Lord is my Shepherd, and that's all I need to know."

Ricky is right, that's all we need to know. Don't try to analyze it, or try to make it fit your thinking; just take it on faith that the Lord is your Shepherd. He loves you, and provides for our every need. Don't strike out on your own thinking that the Shepherd is not needed, you will be sheep devoured by the wolves. Only by following the Shepherd can you find the safe haven. The Shepherd is a positive force, so accentuate the positive. In Isaiah 40: 10-11 it says, "See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and his arms rule for him. See his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young." And in Jeremiah 31: 10 it says, "Hear the word of the Lord O nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd."

Some years ago there was a popular song with the words "Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, and don't mess with Mr. In between!" In other words, build on your strengths; don't wallow in your failures. God has given all of us strengths and by leaning on and trusting him, he will build on those strengths. The Bible contains a story that is based on a similar principal. David, who is the subject of 1 Samuel chapter 17, confronted a giant named Goliath. David didn't concentrate on his

failures as a swordsman, or spear thrower, but he used his abilities with a slingshot. That was his strength, and by having faith in God he was successful.

If you have ever encountered a mechanism that makes you feel insignificant, then you have gotten caught up in "Voice Mail". Imagine that you are witnessing a tragedy and you find yourself in a 911-voice mail system.

"Thank you for calling 911. In order to serve you better your call is being routed to the police, fire department, hospital, or mortuary best able to help you. If your home is being broken into, press 1. If the intruder is armed, press 2. If the intruder is in the room from which you are making the call, press 4. If you are attempting to avoid detection and have turned off the lights, press 2339200976 followed by the pound key...I'm sorry, that is not a valid entry. Please try again. If you've been attacked since your last choice, are dazed, or are unable to recall long strings of numbers, press 5. If you're bleeding, press 6. If you're bleeding all over the rug, press 7. If you're still bleeding, press down on the wound. To repeat this message, press 8.

The good Shepherd will never lead you astray or confuse you. He will always accentuate the positive. We need to follow him and have complete faith in him.

Blessings, and peace to all,  
Ron Hunter





Hope Alive is a non profit organization that was proposed and approved by your Council late last summer. Our mission offering for January will be sent to this group. Many of you may be familiar from reading the local newspapers or receiving mailings from Hope Alive.

Founded in 2002, Hope Alive, Inc. is a non-profit, non-denominational Christian ministry serving homeless women and children in Frederick County, Maryland. Located on 13 acres in rural Sabillasville, Hope Alive can accommodate up to 25 individuals in our beautiful three-story home. Because a safe and stable home is only one step in breaking the cycle of homelessness, Hope Alive offers a four-phase program and comprehensive support services to address the issues at the root of each family's homelessness. Additionally, the Joshua Center serves as our on-site state-of-the-art adult and child development center. Our board of directors, staff, and volunteers are committed to providing quality facilities and programs so that our resident families know they are valued and loved by God. Our foundation of Christian faith and love, a strong emphasis on children's services, and our "whole person" approach to recovery in a loving home environment make Hope Alive unique. Hope Alive's resident families can stay for up to two years while learning new skills and working toward self-sufficiency. We welcome your prayers for our families and your support of this ministry. Together, we can work toward the day when every woman and child in our community has not only a home but also hope for the future. Thank you!

**MISSION Statement** - Hope Alive, Inc. is a nonprofit Christian ministry called to embrace homeless women and their children with the life-changing love of God. In partnership with the community, we offer a transitional home and comprehensive support services to empower women and children with Christian values, dignity, and the skills they need to live self-sustaining lives filled with hope and a future.

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11*

As usual our offering will be collected on the first Sunday of January but you may give any Sunday . Mark you checks for Hope Alive or use the special envelopes in the pews and drop your gift in the regular collection plate.

Candy Goebel, mission chr.

**BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES  
FOR JANUARY**

Leslie Fauconnet	1/10
Tom Crandall	1/11
Rod Miller	1/17
Jeanne & Glenn Beard	1/22

**THANK YOU ♪**

*Many thanks to Barbara & Ed Stephen, Carolyn McMahon, Mark & Kim Helweick, and Andrew and Alex for decorating our sanctuary so lovely for Christmas. Also thanks to Mike and Lisa Gaver for donating the greens each year- thank you!!*

*Leslie, the kids, and I want to say thank you to everyone for the wonderful gifts you have given us this Christmas. The Christmas Bonus from the church, the gift cards, and the gifts from the Sunday School have really helped to make our Christmas special. The gifts were all much needed and appreciated. I want to also say thanks for the wonderful birthday gifts that I've received. Thanks for thinking of me as I hit the half century mark! - Pastor Mike*

*I would also like to thank the church for my bonus - what a help! "Thank you" so much, Marilyn*



The flower chart for 2008 is now up on the bulletin board in the back. If you would like flowers in honor or memory of someone, please write in on appropriate date. Barbara Stephen, our flower chairperson, will order the flowers, or if you prefer to get your own, please let her know (301-865-5085.) The cost is \$30.00. Please make out your check to New Market UMC and put "for flowers," and put in the offering plate. Thank you.