Years ago, at the Iowa Annual Conference, our Conference artist stood to explain his very proactive art. He began his presentation with the sentence: “Hope, the most dangerous and damaging word.” My heart erupted. I know art is meant to be provocative and I know art is supposed to challenge us and I know that is wrong!

Hope is often times all that we have. Hope is where the dissonance of our lives meets our fears, and the broken promises we have encountered and the messiness of what is our lives, encounters God. Hope is not damaging, it is not dangerous when we place it in God. King David reminds us that even in the darkest and most discouraging times hope is where our heart must go. “Why am I so discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise him again – my Savior and my God.” (Psalm 42:5)

David knew how important hope is. Today, I preach the same. Deep hope, rich hope based in the truth that God hears and does not leave his people, is here for us at Christmas.

Many of your radios began playing Christmas – nothing but Christmas a few weeks ago. I think that is great because once you weed the “Jingle Bells” and “Grandma Got ran over by a Reindeer” out, in the carols of Christmas you will find some of the best and most hopeful Christian theology. The first stanza of “O Little Town of Bethlehem” sings these words:

O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by;
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.

Do you see that? In a season of deep darkness for Israel (the Lord has not spoken or appeared for over 400 years), hopes and fears have this holy meeting. Dark is overcome by light and fear is overcome by hope in the presence of the HOPE of the world, Jesus Christ present on earth.

Blogger Virginia Garret writes: “we all have high hopes this time of year. Some hope for a Christmas bonus big enough to cover expenses, others hope for a gift of some kind, others hope for relationships, etc… That isn’t the hope of Advent though. The hope of Advent is a sure hope. It’s a hope that says, “It’s a done deal!” In fact, the Greek word translated into English as hope means, “absolute future certainty.”

Certainty is not dangerous. The Gospel of Luke (1:68) puts it this way. “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people.” Simply, this means our value is not in the future, it’s now. God has redeemed us, and even in the midst of the mess that might be our lives our redemption is completed now. This is our absolute certainty when we believe in the Christ who comes. This is not dangerous or damaging – it is our healing, restoration, completion. That’s why this is a season of hope, joy, love and peace – God’s certainty!

During this season of Advent, the days that lead to the commemoration of the greatest coming of all time, I urge hopefulness. The experienced in life know that hope will not always embrace us at the door of our homes, in the magic of twinkling Christmas lights or the joy of a table surrounded by our most beloved people. Often, behind the carols in the soft melody of the darkness, is the small persistent and unmistakable voice of God crying across our brokenness; “I am with you my beloved, have certainty nothing can separate me from you. Your hope is not supposed to challenge us and I know that is wrong!

This is truth!

Pastor Mike

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Upcoming Sermons
December 16 - The Gospel in Music
December 23 - The Magnificat (Song of Mary) - Luke 1:39 - 56

For any information needing to be published in the Marion Methodist newsletter, please contact the church office.
(info@marionmethodist.org)
A big thank you to all who attended our first handbell Christmas Celebration on REC Drive on Sunday, December 2nd! Your support for this ministry is treasured by the chimers and ringers! Thank you, also, for your generous donations to the Marion Food Pantry to assist those in our community who are in need!

Our entire handbell ministry thanks Diane Beach for her beautiful, original piano accompaniment on “Silent Night” with A Joyful Noise and Jubilation on chimes, as well as her “grand” accompaniment on “Joy to the World” with ringing bells by Bell Canto and A Touch of Brass and singing by A Joyful Noise, Jubilation and concert goers!

It was amazing to walk through the doors from the sanctuary to the Center and be greeted by the United Methodist Men, ready to serve punch to those waiting in line, and for their wonderful homemade soups, muffins, and dessert with ice cream! The fellowship in the Center was wonderful, too! Thank you United Methodist Men for your service to our handbell ministry and concert goers, all done in the name of Jesus Christ!

Thank you Kelsie and Ben DeReus and Hayden Wildman for manning the deck for the lights and sound! The environmental projections were also amazing! Your service to our ministry, in the name of Jesus Christ, was much appreciated!

A special thank you to Gerry Kneeland and his merry men, Gary Garthwaite, Walker Kelly, Curt Liscum, Tom Padley, and Mike Richmond, for their MANY hours of work on the beautiful, new handbell tables! These tables were designed specifically for our handbell ministry at Marion Methodist by Gerry! They are one of a kind! But they are not done yet! As of Monday, December 3rd, these men were back at it working on completing the second row of tables used in our music ministry! These are being constructed at a little slower pace (I’m told)! Thank you for your faithful service, as well!

A Joyful Noise, Jubilation, Bell Canto and A Touch of Brass: your love for the Lord shines through your music! You are true servants, coming to weekly rehearsals and working with your neighbors (especially on Fum, Fum, Fum where there were no injuries)! Your dedication and faithfulness to ring to the Glory of God is appreciated by all who hear! Have a blessed Christmas season as we celebrate the hope that only comes through a relationship with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Amen!

Mary Lee
Pastor Mike Morgan

Dear Friends at Marion Methodist,

We will soon celebrate our very first Christmas together in the worship facility God encouraged and facilitated us to build at 5050 REC Dr. in Marion. Every element of this “first” Advent season has been exciting; Praising God through the carols of our bells, the voices of our children, the chancel choir and of course the exuberance of the 19:14 puppets.

Many of us, as we light the candles that represent hope, faith, love, and peace are able to embrace the beauty and the holiness of the moment. We gaze at the nativity on our gorgeous altar that stands alongside the magnificently crafted Advent wreath and there we see the beauty of our God who has established in our lives strongholds of hope, faith, love and peace. Gratitude fills our hearts, we know we are blessed.

That is what Christmas brings to so many – hope, faith, love and peace. Sadly, Christmas does not bring these wonderful blessings to everyone in our community. So, God created the church knowing that the hearts of those who love Him will desire all to know the wonderful blessings that are hope, faith, love and peace.

Marion Methodist with our flawed and broken people, pastors and leaders seeks in many ways to do exactly this. One way we bless our community is through the Friendship Fund. The “Friendship Fund” is administered by our lead team on your behalf to help people with things like groceries, utilities, buying boots for work, bus passes, motel rooms; fuel; even a simple car repair or two. These things alone do not guarantee hope, faith, love and peace in the hearts and minds of the recipients, but from experience I share with you, they are deeply appreciated and necessary.

On Christmas Eve (or before) we take the singular offering that fuels the Friendship Fund. Enclosed you will find an envelope that you can bring to worship Christmas Eve, or drop it in the offering or mail at any time. If you forget it, use a pew envelope and denote “Christmas Eve” to specifically bless the “Friendship Fund”.

May God richly bless you with hope, faith, love and peace,

Pastor Mike Morgan

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**Meal Schedule:**

12/19 - Firehouse Subs
12/26 - NO POWERHOUSE

**Gift Card Giving**

Part of our Advent tradition at Marion Methodist has included donating gift cards from Kum & Go, Fareway and Walmart to provide assistance to people in our church family and community throughout the year. The cards can be used to purchase food, clothing items, household items, or gas to get to work, look for work and go to appointments.

As you are doing your shopping in the next month, please consider purchasing a gift card or two, for any amount you choose, from one of these businesses. Place them in the offering plate any Sunday this month, or drop them off at the downtown church office. Your generosity will bless people in many ways throughout the year who are struggling to make ends meet.

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**Providing Spiritual Care**

When you or someone you love is receiving medical care, your pastoral staff endeavors to provide the best in Christian love and spiritual care through personal visits and prayer support. The hospitals are endeavoring to protect your personal information, and for that reason, the intake process has changed significantly in the past few years. More times than not, we learn of a hospitalization when someone has already gone home, which diminishes the spiritual care that we truly desire to offer. In order to provide that high level of care we must have your assistance. When you have been admitted or if you are scheduled for surgery please do the following:

Upon registration make it very clear to the person taking your information that you are a member of Marion First United Methodist Church and would like to have your pastoral team notified.

When a hospital chaplain visits you, re-iterate that you are a member of this church and would appreciate a visit from your pastors or ask to speak to one of the hospital chaplains and explain to them that you would like to have your church notified.

Have a family member or trusted friend call the church office at 377-4856, or email the Director of Pastoral Care, Vicki Standley, at vstandley@marionmethodist.org.

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**Powerhouse**

Powerhouse meets every Wednesday. From 5:45 pm to 6:15 pm we have a Family Meal (Free Will Offering) and from 6:30 pm to 7:30 pm we have activities for all ages.

**Preschoolers:** Kids may forget what you say - but they remember what they discover on their own. Get them “Hands On” with God’s Word. (Room E30)

**Kindergarten - 5th Grade:** Meet a Jesus that is real and relevant in your everyday life! Discover Jesus in you. (Room E10 & E60)

**4:12 Youth Group:** Junior High Worship 6:30 pm - 7:30 pm (Sanctuary). High School Worship 7:30 pm - 9:00 pm (Sanctuary).

**Adult Classes:** Come for a midweek boost. Check out classes at www.marionmethodist.org

**Nursery:** Offered in the Nursery

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**TV Broadcast**

Marion Methodist worship services are typically rebroadcasted on Mediacom or ImOn Channel 4 at 7:00 PM on Monday evenings. There is a multiweek delay between when a sermon is preached and when it airs on TV.
Pantry Partners for Marion Food Pantry

We help folks in need by supplying items for the Marion Churches Food Pantry. You may bring the following items to church any time during each month. Please put your contributions in the Mission Depot in The Center or the Church Office.

- December: Pudding and Gelatin Mixes
- January: Macaroni & Cheese
- February: Canned Fruit
- March: Peanut Butter
- April: Macaroni & Cheese
- May: Toilet Tissue

Christmas at Marion Methodist
Make a Christmas Eve service part of your holiday plan. This year we will be worshiping God four times on Christmas Eve.

- 2:00 PM service of Carols, Candlelight and Communion
- 4:00 and 6:00 PM service of Carols and Candlelight
- 8:00 PM service of Carols and Candlelight featuring the 4:12 Worship band