

Reporters at the time were unimpressed by President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. The Chicago Times described "The cheeks of every American must tingle with shame as he reads the silly, flat, and dish-watery utterances of the man who has to be pointed out to intelligent foreigners as President of the American States!" Every year, on Memorial Day, I have read this blessing and been motivated at the President's insight, because he was correct, Our blessing the dedication and commitment of others, is no where near their devoted actions! The words we express cannot hallow the sacred work others have done.

50% of ALL of those who have died in war for these United States, Half of over 1,270,000 people, killed in the War for Independence, through the War of 1812, the Mexican American War, the War Between the States, the Spanish American War, World Wars 1 & 2, The Korean Conflict, the Viet Nam War, the Persian Gulf War, the Afghanistan War, and the Iraq War, HALF of that total number, fought and died in the Civil War, because we lost on both sides.

It causes me to wince, at that President's humility "THE WORLD WILL LITTLE NOTE NOR LONG REMEMBER WHAT WE SAY HERE, BUT IT CAN NEVER FORGET WHAT THEY DID HERE." Wince because, what we have done has been to immortalize words, and all but forgotten those who gave the last full measure of their devotion, and why they did.

With the rioting and casual discussion of a new Civil War between Americans today, we are not dedicating ourselves to that "Unfinished Work." Can Americans across this Great Nation today, claim Lincoln's "high resolve" that we are committed to this "one nation under God continually having a new birth of freedom, that government of the people, by the people and for the people shall never perish from the earth?"

Historians have struggled over how to characterize the American Civil War? Was this a War over Slavery, a War of Northern Aggression, was this a Conflict over Industrialization, a Moral Battle or Politics?

I believe that our current divisions, continue to be over race, over tolerance of people who are different, over whether we can accept and defend other people's rights, or not. Still today, for economic and political points there is a great desire to destroy everything, if we cannot win.

Loyal citizens on both sides of the Civil War fought over whether to tear apart or hold together, and just as in a forge creating metal, these two forces fashioned the complex culture we have been gifted.

SOPHIA, thank you for sharing with us your accomplishment in High School Graduation and being the SUPERFANTABULOUS VALEDICTORIAN of your graduating class. I hope you understand that you have all of these hundreds of GRANDPARENTS who take pride in your accomplishment, for we had nothing to do with all your hard work. Most of us have been to graduations for our Children and Grandchildren, and we listened attentively to your address to your classmates, offering you our prayers and blessings for what comes next in Michigan.

Linda and DeWayne, I thought it was enough that you shared with all of us Sockless Benji and beautiful Alena, because in Green Valley babies and toddlers do not come often enough. Thank you for this blessing. Now, even more, what occurs to me is that while ALL of us like yourselves have come from somewhere else; we recognize as well, that many have come from other churches with knowledge and experience. Thank you for the blessing that you encounter what you believe is the way things had always been done; may have always been done differently in this Church, and we all need to consider other ways that may be out of the box.

This week, our Session received and gave thanks for an incredible gift. Beginning with Rudy Sweisfurth and Linda Walter, then Steve Ginader, Maureen Ramsay, Bud Landry, Ellie Hargleroad, Eloise Fredrickson and Dick Horn, have labored throughout the last year, meeting nearly every-other week, every month.

They have done a deep-dive into every part of the history and identity of this Church. We have spoken with our former Pastors, the Green Valley Council, with long-time members of every phase of our Church. They have wrestled to understand the diversity and identity that is Green Valley today, where originally we were very much an intergenerational congregation. They have come to understand the finances and generosity of this people of GOD. All of which, to write an Historic document, to create a Blessing, of who we are and how we got to be this way. Even more, they have expressed, in the most heartfelt way, their concern for your pastor's physical, mental and spiritual health.

Now we entrust responsibility for this to our Session, to determine what our Church currently needs and can afford for leadership and staffing. The goal of all of this, is to then share with our Presbytery, and coming to agreement; then to report to you the membership what skills we need to find. It would be premature to distribute the Report of this Commission at this point, because our Session and Presbytery have not yet digested this to know how to lead us; as soon as they do, the full report will be shared.

Not Fourscore, but less than 7 years ago, we wrestled that we could not do everything we had; so, do we now need increased staff, if an Associate Pastor: for Business Management, for Faith Formation, for Visitation, or what? This foundational piece is a great accomplishment as these folks have given the full measure of their faith, for the blessings of all of us; with the expectation that over the next ten years we will not again struggle through the turmoil of conflict or need to have another Interim period.

I admit to you that I am not a Pastor who came with an Agenda for all the changes I wanted to make. I am a Pastor who when COVID happened could say, I have 20 years experience with Zoom and know how we can communicate to stay connected.

While the Seminaries I attended would never train someone to be a televangelist, we knew how to make regular improvements to video-record worship for those who could not physically share in fellowship.

I could not fix things when all 17 restrooms backed up at once, but knew not to panic and how we could. More than those, that all we need to do as a People of God, as the Body of Christ, is to TRUST ONE ANOTHER and BELIEVE IN GOD.

Sometimes, it would be easier if we had a Bishop or District Superintendent who could tell us what to do; but, we are building a foundation on the rock of our faith, for the next 70 or 80 years! And anyone who has tried gardening or digging a foundation in Arizona knows, while there is sand everywhere, you hardly need to scratch the surface to discover bedrock all around us. Besides, 70 or 80 years, we are building new bedrock foundations for those like us who will be blessed to be part of Valley Presbyterian Church, who are not yet even born!