

Another Word April 27, 2021

To our friends and family of First Christian Church

It's hard to believe that May is less than a week away. It seems like we were just shoveling snow and, oh wait, we were! Ah, Ohio weather; we get it all, and sometimes all on the same day!

As some of you know, Donita and I are finally going to Cincinnati, and then on to Birmingham to visit our daughters. We will be gone from April 29th to May 5th. We will miss you all, but we thank you for the time off. While I am gone, I have asked Pastor Matt Potosky to be available for any needs that may arise. Matt is a very close friend, and a true man of God.

This Sunday will be a very special service. Brian has prepared a wonderful service of music, solos, readings, and prayers. It promises to be a time of worship not to be missed. We look forward to watching it on our web page this Sunday. This would be the perfect time to invite a friend or neighbor to come and experience God's greatness and love.

You have just a couple of days left to send us a picture of your mom for the picture presentation that will be shown on Mother's Day, May 9th.

You may bring your picture to the church or email it to:

ashlandfcc@gmail.com.

As a reminder, there will be a Celebration of Life Service for Arlene Whitmer, Saturday May 8th at 2pm, at our pavilion.

Our collected cards from last Sunday have been delivered to Crystal Care. Thank you for your continued support.

Make sure you also remember our members and friends who can't easily get out to worship. A card or a quick phone call would be most welcomed.

Our scriptures for this Sunday are Psalm 98, and John 15: 1-8. Mona Campbell is the Elder.

May we pray.

Dear loving Father. We give you thanks each day for your gifts of merciful kindness and faithfulness. May we never become so obsessed with our lives that we lose sight of your presence, your guidance, and your love. As our worldly season moves to a rich and blooming spring, may the season of our lives also spring forth in new ways to share your promise of faith, grace, and love to others. We hold up to you those in need of your calming and peaceful touch. May they feel your presence and find comfort in your arms. Help each of us stay connected to you, and bloom in ways that help others grow in your love. In Jesus' most Holy name we pray, Amen.

It's hard to believe that Donita and I moved into our home almost 36 years ago. Buying an older home has its own particular set of challenges. There can be problems with older plumbing, wiring, heating

and cooling issues, foundation work, cracked plaster, just to mention a few.

But one situation that sticks in my mind happened during our second year here. It was late fall, and there was a lilac bush on the front corner of the house. The bush was over 12 feet tall and was so old and large that the former homeowner had chained it to the side of the house so it wouldn't fall over. On top of that, in the spring, the blooms were so high you couldn't reach them, and the body of the bush, shall we say, was rather sparse and downright ugly.

So, that Saturday as I began pruning the bush, one of our neighbors came running out of her house and yelled at me for daring to cut even one branch. She said, it was fine as it was, and it would die if I cut off the branches. I explained that the bush was too large and that it needed pruning so it could be brought back to its true potential. She did not believe me and stormed back in to her house. But in time, and many further prunings, the bush could finally be unchained from the house, and the blooms were the most beautiful deep purple you have ever seen. And our neighbor was thrilled and could pick as many as she wanted.

Pruning at first glance really looks brutal. But there is beauty that results from these harsh cuts. I learned this lesson first by working in the greenhouses of Ashland Florist while going to college. But there is another lesson about pruning that leads to more understanding of our lives. Jesus also teaches us by using the example of pruning to describe God's work among His believers.

In John 15 Jesus says, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.... Every branch that bears fruit, He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." (Verses 1-2) A branch with a bloom, when cut back will develop even more blooms. Humm, sounds like our lilac bush.

Jesus' words remind us that in good times and bad, God is always working in us toward spiritual revival and to become more fruitful. "Remain in Me and you will bear much fruit." (Verse 4) When we find ourselves in times of pain and suffering, we may wonder if we will ever thrive again. It is during these times that we need to remember that Jesus encourages us to stick close to Him. "No branch can produce fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me." (Verse 4)

Remain in Jesus. If we stay close, connected, and draw our strength and nourishment from Jesus, the beauty of our lives, like the beautiful blooms of our lilac bush, will show the world all of God's goodness.

In His Peace,

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