At the beginning of summer Rev. Ted asked church members to be thinking of the most important things they have learned in life. An insert in the bulletin and a location on the website allowed members to write up to 10 things to share. The answers have been varied, and yet there are themes that tie many of them together.

In order to share these important things with everyone, they have been grouped under the headings of the sermons that were given for the series: Love Unconditionally; Create Stories; Life Is All about Relationships: Listen More -- to Nature, God and Your Inner Voice; and Make the World a Better Place. It is interesting to read what others thought about and what they have learned in life.

We hope you enjoy reading -- From, Writing in the Spirit

WHAT I’VE LEARNED – From the Congregation

Grouped by Sermon Topic

Hold on to the Boat

Many congregants noted the importance of praying to and trusting God to get one through difficulties. People also identified being optimistic and hopeful as important, often in conjunction with having faith in God and assurance of God’s love. Closely related to these learnings were other statements by people about their connection with Jesus and God as sustenance. Following God’s will and seeing how God works in their lives were valuable for several people.

A number of people use acceptance to help them through hard times such as finding ways to live with what one can’t change. Other tools people found helpful were a good night’s sleep to make problems seem more manageable and refraining from complaining, especially about the little stuff.

However, none of this means it isn’t rough when you are going through a hard time. Several wrote about acknowledging the reality of the situation, for example various diseases present real difficulties and obstacles. Yet, we need not to make ourselves heroes or victims when dealt a blow. Some wrote about the need to just “do what we have to do” to get through something and “just breath.”

A few revealed personal challenges and what they learned such as one congregant who wrote, “I’ve learned not to be terrified of the word, ‘cancer.’ No one gets the diagnosis and calls a hearse in the same day.”

Where one puts one’s focus matters to many people. As mentioned, focusing on God is very important. Also, helpful were: not comparing oneself to others and using good memories to help oneself over a rough spot, while not dwelling on regrets and mistakes of the past. A number of people use meaningful mottos such as “this too shall pass” and “if it doesn’t open, it’s not your door.”
Love Unconditionally

Most congregants included at least one item about the importance of love. Many mentioned treating others as you would want to be treated. People also wrote about respecting others and being kind to others. A few mentioned the importance of forgiveness and loyalty. Trusting others was deemed important by some while others had a more nuanced concept such as “trust, but verify.” Some people listed specific behaviors such as not making fun of others and being patient with others. Attitudes that some people adopt include thinking of each person as a child of God and not judging others based on appearance. Some people learned that it’s important to love themselves as a perquisite to or component of loving others. Still others noted that it’s how we treat others who can do nothing for us that is most telling of our character.

Create Stories

People use stories to make sense of life and find meaning. Stories help us find deeper truths. The stories we tell can make us feel richer or poorer. Many people wrote about the value of gratitude toward that end. The benefits of gratitude ranged from shaping people’s happiness to being more aware of the richness and abundance of God’s bounty. Several people wrote about learning that their mistakes did not have to define them. For some, mistakes are opportunities to learn, grow and change. Metaphors, similes and analogies are methods some congregants used to crystalize what they learned. Some use sports, such as the congregant who wrote, “Being born on third base doesn’t mean you hit a triple, being born without a bat and a ball doesn’t mean you can’t play.” Others extended an analogy such as, “If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a metropolis for person to grow old with dignity.” Many likened the lesson that they couldn’t live in isolation to life not being a DIY project. Others used aphorisms such as, “Measure twice, cut once” and “when in a hole, quit digging” to succinctly convey what they’ve learned.

Life is all about Relationship

Relationships seem to be the cornerstone of life. People wrote about the joys of friendship, family and friends who are family. Many learned that considering others’ happiness and well-being – thinking of others’ needs, not just one’s own – is integral. Likewise, service is important to many who wrote about volunteer work and improving one’s community. Many noted character’s importance such as being trustworthy, accountable and honest and having integrity. People mentioned behaviors such as apologizing, smiling, hugging, saying “I love you,” complimenting others, expressing thanks, being polite and exhibiting good manners. People also learned more difficult lessons. Unfortunately, not everyone who applauds you is your friend. Being a parent is difficult, especially when you can’t fix things. It’s important to choose your friends wisely. A few wrote about learning that it only harms themselves when they turn people who hurt them into enemies.

Others mentioned the importance of compassion, empathy and seeking to understand the other person’s viewpoint. Several congregants noted that most people are basically good. Many also wrote of learning to not make assumptions because there is much suffering and trouble in other’s lives about which one knows nothing. A few wrote about learning that it only harms themselves when they turn people who hurt them into enemies. Congregants also wrote of the need to look for what needs tending in another.
Listen More...

To nature
The delights of nature were on some people’s lists. They ranged from letting oneself be amazed by cloud formations to sunsets as proof of the beauty of any given day. People wrote about the healing power of nature: being mesmerized by lakes and oceans, soaking in the sun, playing in the snow, tramping through a forest or simply taking a walk and appreciating God’s beauty.

Others
Several congregants praised the importance of listening to others. Undivided time and attention are gifts we can give to others. We don’t have to agree with others’ opinions to give them the gift of letting them have their voices heard. Some mentioned benefits such as learning more when we listen than when we talk.

Some mentioned specific behaviors such as not interrupting and asking questions rather than providing unsolicited advice.

God
Following God’s will and going where God leads were on several people’s lists. One congregant summed it up as, “Follow God’s teaching: grace, love and mercy.”

Your Inner Voice
Several wrote about the importance of quiet, still moments in solitude to bring peace and other benefits. Others stressed the importance of being present. Others wrote about being true to one’s self and following one’s dreams.

Make the World a Better Place
Many congregants listed things they learned about personal excellence such as trying your best and hard work paying off. Some people wrote about having courage, for example, standing up for what you believe in.

One congregate explained, “you leave a wake as you move through life. You determine whether it is good/bad, big/small, but you always touch whomever and whatever you come in contact with.”

More Lessons
We received many wonderful responses to the prompt, “10 Things I’ve Learned.” However, unfortunately, space does not allow for inclusion of every item. We enjoyed reading the lists and seeing the variety and diversity of thought. Following are a few other themes that emerged when we looked at the responses.

- Life is short, each day is a gift and you only live once, so be sure you are doing what’s important and enjoy the journey.
- Worrying doesn’t solve anything.
- Music calms and soothes the soul.
- Education is important.

And because several people mentioned the importance of humor, we’ll close with this congregant’s lesson: “A hornet’s nest is not a pinata.”