

January 2021

Greetings, Beloved Church Family!

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

It is with the joy of the Lord that I greet you as we welcome the year 2021. Our God has remained faithful to us through the many ups and downs of 2020, and we fully anticipate that His mercy will endure forever! I remain delighted to serve as your pastor, and you remain an absolutely phenomenal church family! Thank you for being the congregation that you are!

As is our custom every other year, we have engaged the Daniel Fast to begin this 2021 experience. Our website provides clear guidance regarding the Fast, and we hope you will join us for the full 30-day journey (January 2nd-31st). This is a spiritual experience, so be sure that as you discipline your body to eat very specific foods, and eliminate all other drinks beside water, you add consistent prayer to your daily routine. Prayer and fasting go together. Be sure you engage both spiritual disciplines during this time. I am well aware that the Fast has its "good days and bad days." Some days are more difficult than others. Therefore, I encourage you to secure an accountability/prayer partner, or a group of individuals with whom you can share mutual encouragement and prayer support throughout the journey. You will likewise be able to share creative ways by which meals are prepared and enjoyed. But remember, creative meal preparation or even weight loss are not the purposes of the Fast. The Daniel Fast is intended to strengthen your discipline and your determination to grow spiritually by depending upon God and not our favorite foods. The other benefits are simply that—benefits!

We likewise remain cognizant that there are many pressing realities upon us as a country. We are poised to change national leadership this month, with the hope that we will experience more compassionate and caring governance for the whole of our nation. But even as we anticipate that change, we recognize that there are so many who are suffering with the reality of the coronavirus either in their own bodies, or in the bodies of their loved ones. We continue in prayer for those who are ill, both within our church family and without. We are grateful that vaccinations have become available for our Founding Pastor and other members of our congregation. Some of our medical professionals have already had both vaccinations, and we pray that many of our seniors will have access to both in the very near future. It is most necessary that I remind our entire congregation that the COVID-19 pandemic has not gotten better; it has only gotten worse. As your pastor (shepherd), I am required to remind you just how serious this virus is. In the City of Houston, we have ascended to the RED Threat Level. The virus has gotten out of control and we must take all necessary measures to ensure our health and safety during this time. Please do your best to stay away from mass gatherings. When you must leave

your home, please only do so by wearing a mask. Please keep hand sanitizer on your person or in your vehicle and repeatedly (and thoroughly) wash your hands throughout the day. I am well aware that many of us are in the "COVID fatigue" phase of this challenge, but that should not stop us from using wisdom regarding our health. The longer we deny the reality or potency of this virus, or refuse to comply with safety precautions given by our medical professionals, the longer we will be away from our beloved church campus and congregation. As shepherd I simply cannot open the doors of our church to mass gatherings while such a threat continues to loom all around us. Let's be sure to bear our responsibility to aid in the elimination of this virus.

Finally, during this month we look forward to the annual celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day! We will honor this beloved Man of God Monday, January 18th at 11:00am in all of our virtual spaces. As is our custom, we will engage an intergenerational experience that calls us not simply to celebrate the work Dr. King did, but anticipate our own roles in guaranteeing that that work continues and accelerates in our lifetimes. We have seen such egregious regression in race relations and respect for all humanity in the past few years. Let's play our parts in the manifestation of what Dr. King called "The Beloved Community." We look forward to sharing with you on the 18th at 11am.

Many more ministry opportunities have been planned for this month and the months ahead. Let's continue to be the great church that God has blessed us to be. I cannot thank you enough for all the many ways you have ensured the excellence of our ministry efforts. Your financial gifts, your faith and God's favor have allowed us to take ministry to a whole new level, even during this strange and abnormal season with which we have been made to deal. So, our recurring refrain is, *To God be the glory!*

Focused on a reimagined future,

M. D. Cosby