

THE EBENEZER STONE

1 Samuel Chapter 7 Verse 12 Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far has the Lord helped us." So, the Philistines were subdued and did not invade Israelite territory again.

Ebenezer meant "stone of help." Thereafter, every time an Israelite saw this stone, it would remind them of God's power, provision and protection.

2020 has been a year of trial, anxiety, disappointments, grief and worry. It started out well, we heard of a virus in China, but we live in a country that can handle these problems. Then February came and we became a little more anxious as the news continued to worsen. In March we were shut down, but we thought it would not be long. In fact, I had already planned the cake I would bake for our first Sunday back to normal. But now it is October, and we are still wearing masks, social distancing and washing our hands frequently. It has been like living in the movie Groundhog Day. What we thought would be a short time has been a long time and with no particular ending in sight. I am a firm believer that God uses these times to draw us closer to him. I don't feel like God has sent us a plague, Killer Hornets, Forest Fires, Tornadoes, Hurricanes, and even an Earthquake in Michigan to get our attention; although if God did, it's working.

God uses the trials in our lives to draw his children, each one of us closer to him. He is there to comfort us to lead us and to make us be all we can be. When the Churches had to close it seemed like an impossible thing, how could our church close. Truth is it didn't. The building closed but with prayer God was there to help us continue to be what the church is about. We are the church and we have proved it this year.

Our Pastor and others set up an on-line worship. Every Sunday we could gather by our computers and watch a Sunday service. We were connected. Then in a very short time there was a group that made sure every member was called every week. Being part of this group was a blessing to me because I connected with the out of area members and others and talked and connected with people I had not seen in a long time and some people I had never met. Then there were the volunteers who made over 1800 masks, and the Food Pantry remained open, floors were stripped and rewaxed, the kitchen was painted, the wooden doors were refurbished, much was done.

In May I had to give my calls to another because my husband was ill and then he passed away. Then came the church, I was cared for with phone calls, food, prayer and so many cards the mailman came to the door to find out what was going on and if we were okay. Some of the phone calls and cards were from the very people on my "call list." This is the church at work. It goes beyond the walls.

Our work continued and we began meeting in the Parking Lot for outside worship, still maintaining a video of the service on the Web site for those who could not attend or preferred to worship at home. God has been good to us this year. 2020 has been

hard but we have been blessed and we have learned lessons about caring for each other and we have learned that God is not just inside the church in the Sanctuary and fellowship hall, but he is outside in the Parking Lot and in our homes.

God is truly within each of us and he calls us to be his people. We are not called to stay inside the building we are called to take the love of Christ that he offers to all outside the building. Now we will be inside once again but for a while there will be no coffee hour, no cake. There will be social distancing and we will wear masks. But we will see each other, talk to each other, and continue to care for each other and when we walk out the door to our homes our neighborhoods and the world, we will take the love of Christ with us. The science is telling us that this is not over yet. But we are in it for the long haul. We will persevere and with God's help we will overcome this pandemic. We will in days to come need an Ebenezer Stone to remind us how far we have come, and that God has been, will be and is always with us and will shelter us in his arms.

Lord, we thank you for your love, for the protection of your grace, You have loved us before we knew you, you will love us today, and you will love us tomorrow and you will love us always. Be with our church as we seek to move outside the walls, to love our neighbor, to love all your children.

Be with our Pastor, bless his ministry, may we be a blessing to him as he is a blessing to us. Be with those who are ill and those who grieve, may they be comforted.

Be with our staff and leaders, guide and protect them. Be with our Bishop and the Cabinet and be with our District Superintendent. Bless their work and guide them.

Grace Epperson