

WELCOME:

Greetings in the Name of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ from Mt Paran Presbyterian Church in Randallstown MD

Due to the Coronavirus Covid-19 2020 shut downs our church is hosting its first of a series of recorded virtual worship events. Our doors maybe closed, but our community and our hearts are very much open to God and to one another. We're just finding and trying new ways with the current restrictions to be community.

God has blessed our congregation mightily over it's 305 year history. In 305 years Mt Paran has seen much, including the day long ago when Bell's invention, the telephone, was the biggest thing on the block. And over the weeks to come your Session Elders and Deacons will continue to reach out to their Shepherd List families by phone as well. And in addition, you'll also be receiving calls and communications from your Pastors.

So today you are participating in a first. You are officially a trailblazer in Mt Paran's History timeline. Our first recorded and posted worship. Now since this technology is new to us we do ask for your prayers, patience, understanding and your feedback as we venture into this new phase of our online connectivity as a community.

Again, God has blessed our congregation mightily over it's 305 year history. One of those blessings is the artistic and technical expertise of our Communications Ministry. Volunteers of this ministry are donating their talent and their equipment and will be doing the filming, posting, creating during the upcoming weeks. The volunteers of our Communications Ministry will also be finding new ways to posting to our website and other venues, making connections through Facebook

and What's App. You should also be looking forward to our April newsletter which will hold many highlights, articles and information.

We are so blessed by your patience and your grace as we travel into this new frontier.

Come let's worship the Lord.

PRAYER – PASTOR DONNA

SCRIPTURE READING

John 15:9-17 New International Version (NIV)

⁹“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹²My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷This is my command: Love each other.

SERMON: PASTOR Anita

I know we've had some issues with our electronic Bible Study which I apologize for and know that we are working to look for a correction and a better way to disseminate the information

Since we've had challenges this week with the information from Max Lucado's Jesus The God Who Knows Your Name, today's sermon will incorporate the material for this week. Our Sermon today is **Jesus, Oh What a Wonderful Friend.**

Isn't it nice to know that in a world that is constantly changing, we can depend on Jesus who never changes!

Jesus is still the same yesterday today and tomorrow for eternity

So what does that mean?

When the world seems dark, He is the God of Light

When the world seems scary, He is the God of Safety and Refuge

When we grow weary of the things of this world, He is our strength

When our health is fragile, He is still the Almighty Healer

When we are afraid He is the One who gently brings us into His loving embrace and says Child of Mine, I will never leave you nor forsake you.:

When we forget, He is the One who brings the things of old to our remembrance just when we need it.

When the stock market falls, He is the Strong Tower that shall never bend and shall never fail

When we sin, He is the center of our forgiveness

When we are without He is our Provider

In these moments when we as a global community are offered fear its important to remember that Jesus is still Our All In All.

We can choose Faith over Fear because we are so great, but because Jesus is.

Each day, we should rise up and seek Jesus anew,

When we do, He re-introduces Himself to us as Max Lucado says as “

The One Who Knows Our Name, As our Friend, As Teacher, As Miracle Worker, As Lamb of God and Finally as the Returning King.

And as a friend, Jesus has no equal. When we selected how we would do this study, the Session was led by God to do a combined in-person Study that is combined with an online presence, and study material that would not require us to have to gather to meet physically each week.

This was picked prior to the announcement of Coronavirus

SO it was already in place not to gather in huddled masses unnecessarily.

Before it was even a thought in anyone's mind, God knew what we would need and how we would need it.

As a matter of fact our church had just started to figure out how to facebook live a worship service or an element of the worship services, and here we are.

Before we knew we would have the need, God knew what we would need.

That makes me feel mighty good church! Because indeed God is indeed a mighty good God.

Indeed a true friend to the friendless.

And this mighty Good God, in the person of Jesus Christ proclaimed in [John 15:15](#) ESV He says to His disciples

No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

Jesus calls us Friends.

In proverbs God says to us [Proverbs 17:17](#)

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

Jesus calls us not only friend, but family.

So I can tell you in confidence that we should not succumb to the fear on the world scene but as Christians, as followers of Jesus we are encourage to act in faith as well.

Yes, we still look to the scientists and the medical advice, and head the recommendations, and warnings. Because after all God gave us a brain that we should use it.

All those things are wonderful but I put my faith in Jesus, the God who stepped out of heaven to pay a price for my soul.

This Jesus who entered into this world of woe from the heights of heaven to pay a debt He didn't owe, that we might have a place at the table of Kingdom of God.

Just as in Luke 19:9-10 New International Version (NIV)

⁹Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

That one day Salvation came to my soul and called me to Him and because I follow a big God, a big friend, I don't allow the circumstances of the day to take my faith and joy in Jesus away.

So let's look to our scripture for today

John 15:9-17

Here, we meet Jesus as he says something remarkable

(9) As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you

Beloved, Jesus loves us with an everlasting love.

Jesus, who was with God in the beginning, as Genesis and later John tells us

John 1 (1)In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome^[a] it.

Jesus, our Friend's love for us is a creative love. It is one that overcomes darkness. He brings light to bear not only on us but upon any situation we may be in. When things seem dark, He is our light.

And not just a 'light' but a light that is an overcoming element. It is a light that chases away darkness completely.

Friendship, belonging with Jesus does not mean that there will never be darkened days, but that I have access to a light that shall overcome it.

The gospel of John goes on to tell us in the 14th verse chapter 1

¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

This Friend of ours, is God Himself, full of grace and truth.

When we may be inundated with information that is not true, we can count on Friend Jesus to be truth to us. If we ask Him for revelation he will reveal to us what we need to see, know and understand.

Because He is truth itself as John tells us, we can be assured that He is not a man that He should lie, but only truth comes from Him.

Since we are told that Jesus was in the beginning, that He was God and He Is God, we know that He is divine. But He came to dwell among us as a part of His creation

And since He was divine as well as human, he understands the trials and pressures of this world.

He's a friend who walked upon the earth that we walk upon.

He's a friend who understands the agony this world may hold

He's a friend who understands that while social distancing is the necessary order of the day he knows that we need connection to one another.

He's a friend of great faith.

His faith, Max Lucado says “His faith made him likable, not detestable. Jesus was accused of much, but of being a grump, sourpuss or self-centered person, MNo. People didn’t groan when he appeared They didn’t duck for cover when he entered the room. He called them by name. He listened to their stories. He answered their questions. He visited their sick relatives and helped their sick friends. He fished with fishermen and ate lunch with the little guy and spoke words of resounding affirmation. He went to enough parties that he was criticized for hanging out with rowdy people and questionable associates.

People were drawn to Jesus. He was always on the guest list.

Thousands came to hear him. Hundreds chose to follow him.

The shut down their businesses and walked away from careers and family to be with Him. His purpose statement read “John 10:10 I came to give life with joy and abundance.” Jesus was satisfied with God and wanted us to be the same.

SO in this time of social isolation Jesus stands as a much needed buffer, guide and confident.

Jesus says, just because people may not be as close as we would like, He is the one who says in Hebrews 13:5-6

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said,

“Never will I leave you;
never will I forsake you.”^[a]

So we say with confidence,

“The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.
What can mere mortals do to me?”^[b]

Jesus' friendship is joy, abundance, assurance in the One True God we are not alone.

In our reading verse 11 and 12 read ¹¹I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹²My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.*

And not just any Love, of Our Friend Jesus the scripture says, He is full of Grace and Truth. One of the friends, disciples that Jesus is speaks to and travels with is Matthew.

Matthew, the public tax collector.

He is the epitome of what we speak to as social isolation or social distancing.

Lucado describes him like this “pg 45 of Jesus The God Who Knows Your Name this way, “Matthew was a public tax collector. Private tax collectors hired other people to do their dirty work. Public publicans, like Matthew just pulled up into the poor side of town and set up shop and they were as crooked as corkscrews.”

Matthew was avoided by everyone. Everybody would have kept their distance from Matthew, except Jesus. When others were trying to duck from Matthew. Jesus, the Friend to

anyone, not only reaches out to Matthew but invited him to come along and be a part of Jesus's band of followers.

I've often felt like Lucado, that "Matthew must have been ripe for friendship because he goes right with Jesus."

This man who had been lonely and alone, hated and despised, was so ready for the kindness and compassion and invitation of Jesus Christ.

Jesus, showed this man Matthew, Grace. Acceptance.

Friendship. Belonging. Jesus the True Friend, meets Matthew where Matthew is and invited him into relationship. Something that Matthew clearly was lacking.

Friend Jesus, continues to do that. Friendship that Jesus showed to the sinner, reminding all that I don't accept your sinful behavior but I will never turn you away. He doesn't respond with exclusion, but Jesus responds to us with inclusion. You are included in the Grace of God, the family of God because I will be a friend who will let you in.

Jesus, our friend of sinners.

John 3:16 has one of the most powerful words of concept in it.

"WHOSOEVER" or whoever

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life

Whosoever and whoever the scripture uses it a lot

Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. Matt 10:32

Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Matt 10:39

Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother
Mark 3:35

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved and whoever does not believe will be condemned Mark 16:16

Whoever believes in the son has eternal life but whoever rejects the son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them John 3:36

Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst John 4:14

Whoever comes to me I will never drive away. John 6:37

Whoever lives by believing in me will never die. John 11:26

Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. Rev 22:17

Beloved of God. The friendship that Jesus call us to and asks us to engage in is a “Whosoever” friendship for the sake of His calling and His kingdom.

The world is faced with a big scare now. We who are the Friends of Jesus are called at this time to remind and reach out in a divine friendship of Jesus the Son of God to remind the world that we serve a bigger God.

Bigger than a virus

Bigger than our fear

Bigger than the issues of the world

As we are posting on FB we are called to remember to respond in compassion to a world that is truly the “who so ever” and invite them to see the Jesus in us.

After all as the Church universal, we are the hands and feet of Jesus Christ Himself.

Not because we are so great and wonderful but because Jesus the Friend of Sinners is.

Not because we may not be afraid but because we can show the world what the Fearlessness of Jesus our Friend looks like

I know Jesus is A Friend because when I was lost in my sins he included me in His call. His Whosoever meant me. And it meant you to. We have work to do.

While the rest of us are called to shelter in place and stay home, many are the heroes of this moment. Those who are in healthcare, transportation, cleaning crews, first responders, our National Guard that are serving at home.

All of these brave and wonderful men and women are called to 'go out' and not stay in, because vulnerable people need to be protected. We who claim Jesus as our savior may be the only representative of Jesus they will meet.

One of us will get on the public transportation and see the one who has fallen through the cracks of society, or we may be within earshot of a conversation of a person who is allowing fear to overtake them.

Our existing during This moment of coronavirus pandemic didn't happen by chance. You may be the only sermon someone will hear or read by how you continue to live your life inspite of the pandemic.

Jesus is your Friend and He asks you to take him to others to be theirs.

And in John passage this evening He says beginning in verse 12-14 *“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command.*

Do we love others with the love that Jesus shows us?

Jesus is a friend that comes with a challenge: Do we do for others as Jesus has done for us?

Beloved of God, go be the church. The world needs it now more than ever.

Amen.