

“Being The Church Of Jesus Christ” by E. Terry Delivered 08 02 20
Romans 12: 1 - 21; Acts 2:42 – 47; Luke 10:25 – 37; **Matthew 25:31 – 46**

As you know, the Corona Virus has forced us to make some changes at church.

The truth is most people do not like change.

We get comfortable with the old way of doing things even though the old way may difficult.

Yes, I miss not having in person worship.

I miss seeing all of you and I miss my hugs but I am excited about the new plans God has for Mt Paran.

Recently Mt Paran has experienced a number of miracles and if we are faithful Christians Mt Paran will experience many more miracles.

The Lord has provided for us, protected us, and preserved us for nearly 305 years.

There is no reason for us to doubt God’s faithfulness.

This morning The Lord is calling us as a congregation to look at the new opportunities God is putting in front of us.

God is testing our church to see if we will embrace new ways of doing things or will we be like the Children of Israel in the wilderness who did not like change and did not trust God.

God wanted to demonstrate His power and God would have performed more miracles but the Children of Israel voted to go back to Egypt when they were faced some difficult situations.

Remember 1st Corinthians 10:11 tells us that the accounts in The Old Testament were given as examples to us so we will not make the same mistakes that the Israelites did.

When we are faced with any difficult situation, rather than complain and ask; *“Why me Lord”* as Christians we should ask The Lord these two questions. *“Lord what do you want me to learn from this situation?”* and *“Lord show me what you want to change in my life?”*

James 1: 2- 4 tells us; ***“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.***

When one door closes The Lord opens another one.

For several years our Session had talked about broadcasting our worship services.

But it wasn't until restrictions on gatherings were put in place that we were forced to begin recording our worship services and placing our worship services on the church's web site, our Facebook Page, and on YouTube.

Pastor Anita tells me that often 180 computers have logged in for the entire worship service.

We know that many of those who logged in have been families watching the worship services.

This means the number of individuals watching our worship services is much greater than the average number of people we had physically attending worship prior to CoVert-19.

Not only have our broadcast been very successful in keeping our church family engaged, we are reaching family and friends all over the world.

The Lord has really blessed Mt Paran's electronic worship services.

For several years our Session looked at ways to shorten our Session meetings.

Zoom Session meetings have accomplished that goal.

When one door closes The Lord opens another one

I believe that God is using the corona virus as another attempt to get our attention as individuals and as a church

This is another call for the church to get serious about telling the unsaved people God has put in our lives that God loves them and God wants to save them from spiritual and eternal death through belief in His Son Jesus.

This is another call for our church to quit hiding in our church building and for Mt Paran to be visible in our community, to reach out to our community, and to make a difference in our community.

God chose the Jews to be His people and God blessed the Israelites so that they would show the world the mighty power of God as well as to show the blessings that God showers down on His people when they faithful obey to Him.

God disciplined the Israelites when they worshipped false gods, disobeyed God's Law, and practiced a sinful life style.

When the Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah Jesus took His ministry to the gentiles.

Jesus established His church to carry on the ministry Jesus started while He was on earth.

Jesus stated His ministry in Luke 4: 18 – 19.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor; he has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lords favor.”

At each Annual Meeting I have challenged our congregation to get involved in some hands-on ministries in our community.

Two years ago, our General Assembly challenged every local congregation to envision what it meant to be a Matthew 25 congregation.

Last November your Session began the process of looking at what it meant to be the church envisioned in Matthew 25.

I asked them and I ask you this morning; *Do most of the people in Randallstown, Windsor Mills, and / or Owings Mills even know that Mt Paran is here?*

If Mt Paran would to cease to exist would it make a difference in our community?

In our lesson from Matthew 25 it is important for us to see what kinds of things those people are commended for and the kind of things these people were condemned for.

The things Jesus listed in Matthew 25 were simple acts of kindness that addressed typical types human suffering.

The commendation and the condemnation of the King were not for the act itself, but rather were for the condition of the people's heart.

Did the people in the parable show mercy, kindness, concern, and compassion?

Those acts of kindness were done in the name of Christ and those acts were credited to the King's account.

A major point in this parable is in the phrase, ***“one of the least of these my brethren.”***

The key to understanding this teaching of Jesus is in the question the sheep asked, ***“Lord when did we see you in... and minister to them?”***

I say this because those individuals represented as sheep did these acts of concern automatically.

Showing compassion was a way of life for these people.

Their nature was love, mercy and compassion.

Next Jesus said, ***“If you did it to the least of these...”*** meaning those people who were the poor, the oppressed, the down and out, the friendless, and / or the people who could never repay their kindness.

Notice the people represented as goats asked Jesus the same question that the sheep did; ***“Lord, when did we see you in need.”***

You see, the hearts of the people represented as goats were so callous that they did not notice the hungry people around them; they were too busy to visit the sick; they were too proud to go into a prison; they were too stingy to give some money; they were too sophisticated to be seen with or to associate with the outcast people.

This morning we all need to ask ourselves; *“am I more like one of those a sheep or am I more like one of the goats Jesus described?”*

“Are we as a church too busy, too proud, too sophisticated, or too stingy to minister to the needs of the people in our community?”

In the first chapter of The Book of Acts we can read about Jesus establishing His church.

In Acts 2 God sent The Holy Spirit to empower His church so we could be His witnesses.

In Acts 3 – 7 we can read about the persecution of the first century church.

During those persecutions individuals and the church enjoyed the presence of The Holy Spirit and they experienced the power of our Risen Lord in their lives.

Then starting in Acts chapter 8 we can read about the church moving out in the world; telling the world about The Risen Jesus Christ; and showing the world what it means to be a Christian.

In the Great Commission Jesus said; ***“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”***
(Matthew 28:19 - 20)

And in Acts 1:8 we read ***“you shall be my witnesses”***

The Presbyterian Book Of Order clearly states; *“The Church of Jesus Christ is the personal demonstration of what God intends for all humanity. The Church is called to be a sign in and for the world of a new reality which God has made available to people in Jesus Christ. You see the church is the instrument that Jesus chose to change the world.*

In The Parable of The Good Samaritan we read that the Priest and the Levite saw the man who was beaten and robbed but they ***“passed by”*** on the other side of the road.

The Priest and the Levite represent the church; the clergy, as well as the members of the church.

These religious leaders did not have any pity on the man that was beaten and robbed.

These religious people did not take time to help another human being.

They may have tried to justify their lack of action since they were in route to a worship service or to a Bible study, or that they were so busy with church work that they did not think they had the time to stop and help.

Maybe they thought it was the government's responsibility to tend to this man.

These religious people could care less what happened to this poor man that was beaten and robbed.

But the Samaritan ***“had pity on him.”***

The Samaritan got off of his donkey and took the time and made the effort to clean and to bandage the man's wounds.

The Samaritan put the wounded man on his donkey and The Samaritan cared for him.

The Samaritan spent his money to care for the wounded man.

I see this parable as an inditement against the church.

I believe Jesus is telling us to get off of our donkey and to get serious about our calling to minister to the people around us who are in need.

When Jesus was on earth Jesus took His ministry out to the people.

While Jesus did teach in the temple, most of Jesus' ministry was outside of the temple.

The corona virus has temporarily stopped us from meeting in person.

I believe The Lord is calling us to be the church outside of these four walls.

The church is not a building.

As Christians we are the church.

You see each one of us make up the Christians at Mt Paran.

As Christians we are the body of Christ. (1st Corinthians 12:27)

In the 12th chapter of 1st Corinthians The Apostle Paul went to great lengths to explain the important role each member of the church has when he compared the church to a physical body.

Your physical body cannot walk without feet.

You cannot see without eyes and you cannot hear without ears.

Our church is not fully functional if every member of the Mt Paran family is not doing their part.

As Christians we are followers of Jesus Christ. We all have made a commitment to follow Jesus and model our lives after Jesus' example.

This morning Jesus is calling each one of us to follow Him out into our community and to join Jesus in ministering to the people in need.

We must never forget that God has **blessed us** so that we can be a blessing to others.

God has **forgiven us** so we can forgive other people.

We have experienced God's **love** so that we can share our love with our neighbors.

As Christians we are called to minister to people.

If our Church is going to be an effective influence on our community, every one of us must answer Jesus' calling to minister to the needs of the people we come in contact with each day.

What about you, will you answer Jesus's call to get off of your donkey and minister to the people around us who are in need.

“Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16: 24)

God is testing us as individuals and as a church to see if we will get out of the boat and join Him in His ministry to our community.

Friends we must be like the Samaritan and get off of our donkey and answer Jesus' call to minister to the people around us.

AMEN