

“Our Next Chapter” by Pastor Ed Terry Delivered 11-08-20

Colossians 3:1 - 17; Ephesians 4: 1 – 7 & 11 – 17; Joshua 3: 1 – 5; Romans 12:1-21

This week Mt Paran will begin a new chapter in our church’s history.

I will be retiring as your pastor and Pastor Anita will become your next pastor on November 14th.

As we begin a new chapter in Mt. Paran’s history, I believe that it is healthy for us to stop and take an honest look at ourselves as individuals and for us to take an honest look at ourselves as a congregation.

I also believe that remembering our history and recalling how The Lord has provided for Mt Paran and protected us will give us the assurance of The Lord’s presence, the strength to face the challenges, and the courage to embrace the future.

Mt Paran has really been blessed and The Lord has allowed me to witness Mt Paran’s miracle of transformation from a small older all white congregation into a vibrant younger multi-cultural family of believers.

In 2004 we only 34 members and we thought 15 people at worship was a big crowd.

Today we have 262 members and our average Sunday morning worship attendance was 140 prior to Covid-19.

Today there are more people watching our worship service on our church’s web site, Facebook, and YouTube than attended our worship services prior to Covid -19.

In 2004 we only had one child in our congregation.

Today we have youth activities for all ages and we were blessed by having over 40 children attend our Friday night youth program and in our youth choirs.

I have also been blessed to see our congregation grow spiritually.

Many of you have experienced the miracles of God providing for all of our church’s needs.

The size of our church’s parking lot has been increased four different times since I have been your pastor.

And each time the additional parking spaces were paid by someone outside of our congregation.

We got a new driveway entrance from Liberty Road that was paid for by The Baltimore Christian Faith Center.

When our manse burned down many people said this was a terrible thing.

But it was a blessing in disguise because we were able to build a new manse with updated appliances and a more efficient heating and air conditioning units with the insurance settlement.

Again, when the air conditioning unit for the Fellowship Hall was stolen our insurance company replaced it with a more energy efficient unit at no expense to us.

I have attended a number of immigration hearings and in every case the judge has ruled in favor of our members even when there was substantial evidence against one of our members.

Mt Paran is not perfect but I can honestly say that Mt Paran is the most loving and caring congregation I have ever been a part of.

And that is because of each one of you.

Please do not ever change that.

But if we only keep looking in the rear-view mirror we will crash.

We need to focus on what is ahead of us.

We all need to prepare for the journey God has planned for us.

We all need to spiritually prepare ourselves and we all need to embrace the plans The Lord has for Mt Paran in the future.

In Joshua 3:5 we read that the way to prepare for a journey is to consecrate ourselves.

God said; ***“Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow The Lord will do amazing things among you.”***
(Joshua 3: 5)

Consecration is a three-step process.

The first part of consecration is to purify yourself by repenting of your sins and seeking forgiveness from The Lord.

The second part of consecration is to make a conscious decision to separate yourself from sin, evil, worldly values, and worldly practices.

And the third part of consecration is to dedicate yourself to the worship and to the service of Jesus Christ.

Consecration is not a one-time act.

But rather consecration is a continuous process that needs to take place each and every day.

Our lesson from Romans 12 gives us an understanding of what a consecrated life looks like.

A person leading a consecrated life willingly offers their life as a living sacrifice to The Lord Jesus Christ.

A person leading a consecrated life is not shaped by worldly values nor are they guided by worldly standards.

But rather their life is a reflection of the love, the forgiveness, the joy, the peace, the kindness, the gentleness, and the compassion of Jesus.

This morning we all need to ask ourselves;

“Is Jesus really The Lord of my life?”

Have I surrendered all aspects of my life to Jesus?

Have I earnestly sought to transform my mind by studying my Bible each day or am I still being shaped by worldly values?

Do I look forward to worship?

Is living a life pleasing to Jesus my number one priority?

I ask each of you to join me in accepting the challenge to consecrate yourself every day.

In our scripture lesson in Ephesians we also saw that the goal of every believer is to become a mature Christian. (Ephesians 4:11).

The only way to become a mature Christians is by being totally committed to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

You demonstrate your commitment by studying God's Word, actively participating in worship, telling other people the difference Jesus makes in your life, participating in fellowship activities, helping those less fortunate than yourself, and getting involved in peacefully promoting solutions to the social issues that plague our society.

None of us want to be the baby Christian the Apostle Paul wrote about in his letter to the Corinthians (1st Corinthians 3:1).

What about you, will you join me in accepting the challenge to become spiritually mature?

The challenge to sanctify yourself and the challenge to become spiritually mature may seem overwhelming to some people and other people will say it is an impossible dream.

But all things are possible through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13).

If we truly depend upon the Holy Spirit to empower us, these goals will indeed become the not so impossible dream.

None of us will sit back if we are true to the calling of Jesus Christ.

This is not just a dream for Mt. Paran Presbyterian Church.

This is Christ's design for His church.

I will paraphrase a famous quotation of Former President John F Kennedy:

"Ask not what your church can do for you, but what you can do for your church."

In Joshua 3:3 & 4 we read as the Children of Israel were about to begin a new era in their history they were told; ***"Follow The Ark Of The Covenant of The Lord Your God. Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before."***

The Ark of the Covenant symbolized God's presence and God's protection to the Children of Israel. When I became your pastor, I did not know where we as a church were going. But that was not important because we knew Jesus knew and we knew our job was to follow Jesus.

The same thing is true today.

We do not know where we will be 10 years from now but Jesus does.

Our job is to follow Jesus as He leads us.

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said to Peter, ***“Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not over power it.”***

If we were to look at the preceding verses, we would see that the rock that Jesus was referring to was not Peter but the faith that Peter exhibited.

This is the church of Jesus Christ and the church is founded on faith in Jesus Christ.

A church does not succeed or fail because it has a dynamic pastor, a large building, a large membership, or a large bank account.

A church will only fail because of what goes on inside of that church's congregation or probably more often what does not go on inside of that church congregation.

A church will only achieve its full potential and will only accomplish its mission if it has unfaltering faith in Jesus Christ.

2nd Corinthians 5:7 tells us we are to ***“walk by faith and not by sight.”***

A church will only achieve its purpose if we keep our eyes on Jesus!

In Matthew 14:28-31 we have the account of Peter walking on the water.

When Peter saw Jesus walking on the water Peter said, ***“Lord ... tell me to come to you on the water.”***

You see Peter wanted to be close to Jesus and Peter wanted a deeper relationship with Jesus.

Peter wanted to do what Jesus was doing.

Peter was successful at walking on the water as long as Peter kept his eyes on Jesus.

But when Peter took his eyes off of Jesus and looked around and saw the wind and the waves Peter became afraid, Peter lost his focus, and Peter began to sink!

We as a congregation will begin to sink if we take our eyes off of Jesus.

If we look at the sinful world around us, if we think about the humanly impossible task that our congregation faces we will sink.

If we lose our focus we are doomed to failure.

But fortunately, the story of Peter walking on the water does not end there.

When Peter began to sink he cried out to Jesus, ***“Lord, save me!”*** and when Peter cried out for help Jesus reached out his hand and pulled Peter up and saved him.

We as individuals and we as Mt. Paran Presbyterian Church have the same opportunity as Peter did to do miraculous things.

But if we are to do miraculous things we must recognize our human frailty, our inabilities, and our inadequacies. We must get out of the boat and we must depend upon our Lord to save us.

None of us want our church to falter!

Nor do we want Mt. Paran Church to be known as the lukewarm church in Laodicea that John wrote about in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 3:16).

We want Mt. Paran Presbyterian Church to truly be Jesus’ witnesses to the people in West Baltimore.

And there is only one way that will happen and that is through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said, ***“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria, and even to the remote parts of the earth”*** (Acts 1:8).

As we begin this new chapter in the life of our church we must never forget God that created each of us with specific talents and He put us here at this particular time in history for a specific purpose.

Think about the potential of Mt. Paran ***if*** all of our 262 members were totally committed to following Jesus, who labored out of love for The Lord, and were depended upon the Holy Spirit for guidance, energy, and power?

Friends, this is the vision that Jesus Christ had for His church.

This is God’s plan for Mt. Paran Presbyterian Church as we begin this new chapter in our church’s history.

To achieve the Lord’s plans for Mt Paran each one of us need to renew our commitment to follow Jesus and to become more involved than you have in the past.

The Lord is calling many of you to take leadership roles in ministering to the needs in our community.

If we want to reap a harvest in the future we must plant the seeds of faith today.

Next Saturday Pastor Anita will become your new pastor.

Each one of you have a responsibility to embrace her, to support her, and to pray for Pastor Anita.

I know I can count on each of you to preform each of those very important duties.

As we begin this new chapter in our church's history each one of us is faced with the choice to walk with The Lord, to obey all The Lord's commandments, and to serve The Lord **OR** to choose to go our own way by living for ourselves.

If you choose to walk with The Lord, obey The Lord's commands, and serve The Lord you and our church will experience God's blessings.

However, if you choose to go your own way, God will discipline you, you will forfeit God's blessings, and God will withdraw His presence and His protection from you. We all have to make that choice.

In Joshua 24: 15 we read the choice Joshua gave to the people.

Joshua said; ***“choose you this day whom you will serve, ... but as for me and my household we will serve The Lord.”*** (Joshua 24:15).

What about you will you choose to love The Lord, to obey The Lord, walk with the Lord, and to serve The Lord.?

God told the Children of Israel to ***“Follow The Ark Of The Covenant of The Lord Your God. Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before.”***

Jesus has called each of us individually and us as a congregation to follow Him out into our community and to minister to the needs of the people around us.

We do not know where we will be 10 years from now but when we keep our eyes on Jesus and are closely following Jesus, we will know which way to go.

If you want to see The Lord to do amazing things in your life and for The Lord to do amazing things in the life of our church, we must consecrate ourselves, we must obey all of Jesus' commandments, we must follow our Lord's leading, we must become mature Christians, we must depend on the power of The Holy Spirit, and we must become living sacrifices.

Our Lord is longing to bless us individually and as a congregation with His presence, His power, His provisions, and His peace.

But we all have to do our part.

Isaiah 25:1 we read; ***“LORD, you are my God; “I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done wonderful things, things planned long ago.”***

Jesus said, ***“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.”*** (Matthew 6:33)

Amen