

**REFLECTION
ST. DAVID'S UNITED CHURCH
SUNDAY, AUGUST 15TH, 2021**

**RETURNING TO A "NEW NORMAL"
ANTICIPATING LIFE AFTER COVID-19**

"THESE ARE DIFFICULT DAYS. SO BE CAREFUL HOW YOU LIVE THEM. MAKE THE BEST OF THE PRESENT TIME".

INTRODUCTION

THESE WORDS ARE FROM THE LETTER OF EPHESIANS, CHAPTER FIVE, WHICH OFFER US TIMELESS ADVICE FROM OUR SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR THIS MORNING.

MANY BIBLICAL SCHOLARS ASSUME THE AUTHOR OF THIS LETTER WAS SOMEONE OTHER THAN THE APOSTLE PAUL, EVEN THOUGH THE WORDS CLAIM TO CONTAIN PAUL'S THOUGHTS, THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUAL INSIGHTS.

THE PEOPLE IN THE EARLY CHURCH, TO WHOM THESE WORDS WERE FIRST ADDRESSED, WERE TRYING HARD TO LIVE IN GOD'S WAY, AND TO BE ONE FAMILY IN GOD. BUT JUST LIKE ALL FAMILIES, THEY FOUND THEMSELVES BICKERING AND FIGHTING.

PAUL WAS FEELING FRUSTRATED AND RESTLESS. HE HAD BEEN IN PRISON FOR SOME TIME NOW, AND THERE WAS VERY LITTLE HE COULD DO EVERY DAY BUT SIT, PRAY AND WRITE.

PAUL WAS NOT THE SITTING TYPE. HE WAS THE DOING TYPE. AND – NOT BEING ABLE TO DO ALL THE THINGS HE WANTED TO DO — WAS STARTING TO BOTHER HIM.

HE THOUGHT A LOT ABOUT THE CHURCHES HE HAD FORMED AND WANTED TO HEAR REPORTS ABOUT HOW THEY WERE DOING. MANY WERE HAVING A DIFFICULT TIME. INTERNAL DISSENSION MEANT THAT LITTLE GOOD WAS HAPPENING IN SOME OF THEM.

THESE NEW CHURCHES WERE FRUSTRATED, AND, AS A RESULT MANY MEMBERS HAD GIVEN UP. INSTEAD OF BEING ABOUT GOD'S WORK, TOO MANY OF THEM HAD BECOME LAZY AND UNFOCUSED. THIS LETTER WAS MEANT TO ENCOURAGE AND REMIND THEM TO DO GOOD THINGS EACH DAY BY INTENTION AND NOT WASTE AWAY THEIR TIME.

HERE AGAIN ARE THE KEY WORDS OF THE EPHESIANS PASSAGE – “THESE ARE DIFFICULT DAYS. SO BE CAREFUL HOW YOU LIVE THEM. MAKE THE BEST OF THE PRESENT TIME”.

I BELIEVE THAT WHAT THESE WORDS MEANT THEN CAN BE GOOD ADVICE FOR US NOW.

DISCERNING THE TIMES

SO LET’S FAST-WARD 2,000 YEARS TO OUR PRESENT SITUATION.

AS WE ENTER WHAT IS HOPEFULLY POST-QUARANTINE TIMES FOR US AT ST. DAVID’S, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE BE A DISCERNING PEOPLE. TO ‘DISCERN’ MEANS TO BE SPIRITUALLY WISE IN WHAT WE THINK AND DO.

AFTER 18 MONTHS OF LOCKDOWN AND CONTROLLED BEHAVIOUR WE SEEM TO BE APPROACHING AN IMPORTANT PERIOD OF TRANSITION. FOR THE REMAINDER OF MY MESSAGE I WOULD LIKE US TO QUICKLY REVIEW WHERE WE HAVE BEEN; WHERE WE ARE NOW; AND WHERE WE MIGHT HOPE TO BE IN THE FUTURE.

THE PANDEMIC HAS CHANGED US.
ZOOM HAS CHANGED US.
WE WON’T BE THE SAME AGAIN.

OUR FUTURE MAY WELL SEE US CHANGED IN WAYS WE CANNOT IMAGINE. THE ‘NEW NORMAL’ MAY BE A LOT DIFFERENT THAN WHAT WE EXPERIENCED AS NORMAL IN THE PAST.

I WOULD LIKE TO BELIEVE THAT COVID HAS CAUSED US TO BE A MORE CARING PEOPLE. I DON’T RECALL A TIME IN THE PAST WHEN SO MANY OF US HAVE BEEN PAYING ATTENTION TO THE WELL-BEING OF OTHER MEMBERS OF OUR CONGREGATION.

A BIG FACTOR IN ALL THIS HAS BEEN OUR EMBRACE OF ZOOM.

SOME OF OUR NUMBER MAY NOT FEEL MUCH ATTENDED TO AS A RESULT OF THE CHANGES. THEY MAY CONSIDER THEMSELVES OUTSIDE THE TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE. ZOOM HAS MANY DRAWBACKS, BUT IT HAS TENDED TO MAINTAIN, EVEN ENHANCE, LIFE FOR MANY OF US. EARLIER CONNECTIONS FOR SOME AT LEAST HAVE IMPROVED.

A BIG CONCERN OF MINE AT THIS POINT IS – WHO HAVE DISAPPEARED FROM OUR NUMBER THESE PAST MONTHS? HAVE THEY LEFT US PERMANENTLY? OR WILL A GOODLY NUMBER RETURN WHEN FACE-TO-FACE GATHERINGS ARE AGAIN POSSIBLE?

WHAT INTENTIONAL PLANS ARE BEING MADE TO RECONNECT WITH THE PEOPLE WE MISS NOW FROM OUR CONGREGATION?

WHAT INTENTIONAL PLANS ARE TAKING SHAPE TO BUILD CONNECTIONS WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE JOINED US SINCE WE STARTED USING ZOOM?

WILL WE BE ABLE TO TURN AN IMPORTANT NEW MINISTRY TOOL INTO AN EVEN BETTER ONE?

WILL OUR COMMUNITY TAKE ON NEW, MEANINGFUL AND EXCITING SHAPE BECAUSE OF ZOOM AND WHAT WE HAVE EXPERIENCED WITH IT?

A NEW COMMUNITY AWAITS US

ZOOM HAS CHANGED US. IN MANY WAYS FOR THE BETTER. IT OFFERS US NEW RESOURCES, NEW AUDIENCES AND NEW WAYS TO LIVE IN COMMUNITY TOGETHER.

AT THE SAME TIME, WE DON'T WANT TO LEAVE ANYONE BEHIND.

BECAUSE OF WHAT WE HAVE BEEN THROUGH - **HOW WILL WE FOCUS ON COMMUNITY BUILDING** THAT WILL UTILIZE SOME OF THE BEST WE HAVE LEARNED DURING THESE STRATEGIC TIMES? SOMETHING NEW WILL EMERGE AMONG US -- AN IMPORTANT REALITY THAT CAN DEVELOP FROM THESE DIFFICULT MONTHS. WILL WE SEE AND BE PART OF IT?

FOR EXAMPLE – THE MEANING OF SUNDAY CAN CHANGE FOR US. BECAUSE WE ARE NOW VISUALLY AND VERBALLY REPRODUCING OUR SERVICES FOR BROADER AUDIENCES THAN WE HAD BEFORE. WE HAVE LEARNED THAT GATHERINGS AT A FIXED HOUR ON SUNDAY MORNING ARE NO LONGER THE ONLY WAY TO BE TOGETHER. WILL SUNDAY BECOME MORE THAN IT ONCE WAS?

WORSHIP ITSELF CAN CHANGE AS WE ARE NOT LIMITED TO BRING MUSIC AND PRAISE TOGETHER PHYSICALLY AT A SPECIFIC HOUR. WORSHIP CAN BECOME MORE FLEXIBLE AND ADAPTABLE.

THE MEANING OF SUNDAY AND WORSHIP – ARE BUT TWO SIGNIFICANT CHANGES THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE, WHETHER WE REALIZE IT OR NOT. I WOULD SAY THAT COULD BE A GOOD THING AND OUR CONGREGATIONAL LEADERS WOULD PROBABLY DO WELL TO THINK CAREFULLY AND CREATIVELY ABOUT THIS.

A DANGER TO BE AWARE OF: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE LOSE SOME OF THE PERSONAL CONNECTION WE HAVE TREASURED HERE AT CHURCH FOR SO LONG?

WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN WE TRY TO RECONSTRUCT THAT CONNECTION AND REAL LIFE IS NOT LIKE IT ONCE WAS?

LET'S CONTINUE TO CONSIDER THE INTERNET – BUT ONE ASPECT OF THE BIG CHANGE IN STORE FOR US. THE INTERNET PROVIDES A RICH VARIETY OF RESOURCES, AND SOMETIMES TOO RICH A VARIETY.

I AM VERY GRATEFUL TO THOSE FROM OUR MIDST WHO HAVE CREATIVELY HELPED US TO TECHNOLOGICALLY NAVIGATE SO WELL. CAN WE EXPECT THEM TO HELP US CONTINUE THESE EFFORTS TO FACE NEW CHALLENGES? WE DEPENDED ON TECHNOLOGY LONG BEFORE THE VIRUS ATTACKED. CAN WE HOPE TO EXPECT THAT TECHNOLOGY WILL REMAIN A STRONG CONSTRUCTIVE ALLY IN OUR REBUILDING OF COMMUNITY IN THE DAYS AHEAD?

GRIEVING AND CELEBRATING

NO DOUBT, WE HAVE OUR LOSSES TO GRIEVE AND WE MUST INDEED TAKE OUR TIME TO GRIEVE AUTHENTICALLY. BUT WE ALSO HAVE MUCH CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION AS WE REALIZE THAT AMAZING THINGS HAVE HAPPENED HERE THESE PAST MONTHS AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES AWAIT US IF WE PREPARE FOR THEM.

NOW, RETURNING IN A WAY TO WHERE WE BEGAN, THE CHURCH HAS GONE THROUGH MANY CHANGES SINCE PAUL'S LEADERSHIP TEAM FIRST OFFERED ADVICE TO FAITHFUL BELIEVERS MORE THAN 2,000 YEARS AGO. REMEMBER --

“THESE ARE DIFFICULT DAYS. BE CAREFUL HOW YOU LIVE THEM”.

I SUGGEST WE TAKE SOME TIME AFTER WORSHIP TODAY AND THROUGH THE NEXT WEEK TO THINK ON THESE THINGS.

WHAT WE HAVE BEEN THROUGH COULD INDEED PROVIDE US WITH GREAT NEW OPPORTUNITIES, NOT JUST SET-BACKS.

I HOPE THAT WHAT HAS BEEN SHARED WILL HELP US FIND A GOOD 'NEW NORMAL' IN THE DAYS AHEAD; AND WHOLESOME NEW WAYS TO LIVE OUR FAITH IN COMMUNITY.

AMEN