

We are back!!

Its been 3 months...3 months that I would never think I would not be with all of you each week...but here we are...WE ARE BACK!!!

Let me hear the biggest shout inside and out!!!

Being back together today is like a big family reunion!
What do you do at family reunions?

This morning I want to look at some Scriptures and answer that..

The first thing we do is...

Share what we learned

As believers we should always be learning and I would suggest if you are not learning you are probably not getting yourself into God's Word or allowing yourself to study passages that you would not normally study.

The book of Proverbs starts out telling us how important it is to learn and gain wisdom.

Proverbs 1:2-7 To know wisdom and instruction,

to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth, Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

God's Word teaches us to live righteously, to be just, to discern, to be guided by God, to fear God and if you don't desire to gain wisdom and instruction from God this passage calls you foolish.

I preached for 12 Sundays and Good Friday on "Learning and Growing in Crisis" I did not plan to do 13 messages on that topic this year but the Pandemic hit.

That series was special to me because I can say each week I preached to all of you I was learning and growing through those issues myself. God used His

Word to speak to me while I was preparing for all of you and each week I felt that were walking through all these issues together even though we could not be together.

Something interesting happened as well...each Sunday I would tune in listen. Most people would think...Ah you don't have to listen to that...you prepared it and preached it...but I listened every week.

It was a strange experience watching myself preach every week...but while listening I found myself not learning new information on those Sundays because I planned and prepared the sermons.

But what I did experience was God speaking to my heart and inspiring me while I sat and listened and worshipped with the songs. I think much of it was that I was not concerned with the things that I have to be concerned with when we are here on Sundays at the church. My heart and mind were relaxed which is difficult to do on a normal Sunday as a pastor.

The Sunday that stood out to me the most was Memorial day weekend when we learned about freedom in Christ.

After preparing, prerecording and then listening to an entire sermon about freedom...I still didn't feel very free because I was not free to be in worship service with my fellow believers.

But then at the end we sang that song "Death was Arrested" Towards the end of that song when the lyrics say... *Oh we're free free, Forever we're free, Come join the song, Of all the redeemed, Yes we're free free, Forever amen, When death was arrested, And my life began*

I realized the very thing that I preached that morning... ***I have a freedom in Christ that no one can take away***...whether I can go to worship service, have a Bible, pray in public or even preach the Name of Jesus...even if all those things were taken from me I am still free in Christ and no one can take that away...

What are some of the things you learned while we were apart for 3 months? Take time after service to share

that with someone here, share that with someone this week.

The next thing that we do at a family reunion is we...

Share our struggles

I think if we are honest with ourselves there is probably not a person here that did not struggle with something emotionally, spiritually and maybe even physically through all this.

There are a lot of layers to all this...there is the financial struggle for some...maybe you lost your job, maybe you lost your business or maybe you are way behind on your bills. These are real struggles.

Of course the church and people here are not prepared to support entire families but maybe if you lost your job someone that goes to this church has a job for you or knows of a job that would be right for you.

Sometimes when people that never lost a job in their life lose a job they are ashamed and embarrassed and don't want anyone to know...if you keep that struggle to yourself you may continue to struggle. We are all

family in Jesus and the only way we can help is if you make that struggle known.

Maybe you are struggling emotionally...Maybe this pandemic put you in a place of fear...and now that we are getting back to normal you are finding it hard to adapt or let your guard down.

You may need to share that struggle with another believer to help bring faith and reality back into the framework of the way you see things.

Maybe you are struggling spiritually...being out of fellowship for 3 months straight has taken its toll, your motivation for spiritual things has been squelched and you feel very distant from God and His people. You may need to share that struggle with another believer to help with ideas and encouragement on what to do.

The struggles are real and one main reason is because... We have MISSED this...being here together...do you remember when God created Adam? Adam had no one except for God...God said "its not good for man to be alone".

That raises some serious questions...is a relationship with God not enough? Well according to God apparently we were created to be with other people... but why?

God created us to be in community with other people. Those people can be there with us during our times of struggle.

Galatians 6:2 tells us that we have an opportunity to “fulfill the law of Christ” because we have other people in our lives...it says *”Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”*

What does that mean? Well the law of Christ is LOVE and when we bear the burdens of others we are showing them love...and if we are never around other people we have no real reason, necessity or opportunity to show love.

The virtual connection we had was kind of real but it was no match for what we are doing this morning. Remember the first week we were online there were technical difficulties?

Most of you that got in the service used the chat feature, the chat was a little exciting and people were talking to each other.

By last week of online service there were no technical difficulties but the chat was like “Good Morning” at the end it was “Have a Great day”.

I started to run into people during the week and they would say...I normally just watch when its convenient not at the time its posted.

Online content is great to have to catch up or be inspired at other times besides Sunday mornings....But I think we have all come to realize with Online Church the connections are superficial at best.

Most studies show that looking a screen too long cause a multitude of problems including depression.

When we are alone we live in our struggles longer because we don't have others to “*bear our burdens*”.

Jesus has brought us together in this community and this body of believers to show others love by being

there for one another and the fact that we have not been able to do this for 12 weeks straight has made it very evident that we need this more than we ever really understood.

Which brings us to our next thing we do at a family reunion and that is...

Look forward to the future

-Near future

We still have the same Purpose and mission since 1977 “Making disciples of Jesus Christ...During these 3 months we still did that and even though we were limited.

The GOSPEL needs to go out.

The way we do that will always change but the changes will be mostly...”Add Ons” not “Take Away”

Here is what I mean...we will always meet together and have the Gospel Preached like we are doing today.

Why do I say this...well I listen to a lot of church leadership podcasts and read articles and to my disappointment many have been saying things like

during the pandemic..."church as we know will be changed"... "we will have a new normal some churches will be virtual and never physically meet again"...

Obviously at the very core of my being I do not like to hear things like that and I do not agree at all.

So I decided to see if Pastor John McArthur made any statements about this topic. If you do not know who he is he is an 80 year old pastor and theologian out of Southern California and has been in ministry at the same mega church for 50 years and started a Seminary there. His church, like ours suspended services for this pandemic.

I have read many of his books and used many of his commentaries to prepare sermons for all of you so I trust his Godly advice and opinions.

Here is what John MacArthurs comment was about the church being changed forever and the new normal taking over...He said the Church has been meeting physically for over 2000 years and will continue to meet physically until Jesus comes back there will be no new normal when it comes to that.

Why did MacArthur say that? Because he knows what the Scriptures say about the Church and honestly we would be disobedient if we decided to change and not go back to physically meeting. We can and will add technologies but we will never take away meeting together on a permanent basis.

Next in the near future we should be...

Serving

One of the difficult things about this shut down type situation was many of the ministries you have come to know and love were put to a halt. Sure some were able to be held online...but many of you have also learned that almost every platform has a mute button and you can log out so that does not really accomplish the ministry.

It is time to get back in action...the cleaning ministry, buildings and grounds, worship ministry, prayer ministry, youth ministry, some bible studies have all started to get back up and running. Don't let the temptation of laziness, fear of starting up or let the devil

get a foothold and keep you from getting back to serving.

I trust you will all do that...and the truth is you have proved yourself during this time...how?

Did you happen to look at the giving in the bulletin today. Do you realize that the day after we closed the physical building down our leadership council had a meeting, at that meeting we discussed that we were almost 60K over in our giving this year so we have a good reserve if this takes the toll that many were predicting financially.

Guess what? Yup we are still almost 60K over today! I see that as an expression of the commitment all of you have to Jesus and the work He has for this church.

During this 3 month online church time...the only thing I said about giving was in the very first week when I told you how you can do it now that we are not physically meeting. I am pleased to say that you are a faithful group of believers!!

Next in the near future we should be...

Sharpening our faith daily.

This means get on a program of daily Bible reading and pray, maybe picking topics to study and research

Some of you will responded to this past 3 months the biblical way and you may have already said this to your family...we are committed to be in church every Sunday because we never know when a situation like this will happen again.

You have come to the conclusion this is not a suggestion it is a biblical command in Hebrews 10:24-25 *“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”*

Which brings us to that fact that as Christians we also look forward to the...

-Distant future

The ultimate reunion! In the new heaven and new earth where God will live with people, *Revelation 21:4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death*

shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

We as believers should look forward to that day when we will dwell with God forever and there will never be an Executive Order that will keep us from that worship service.

The final thing we do at a reunion is...

Celebrate

Today we are going to continue to celebrate in 3 ways...

The first is

Communion (lead communion)

The second is

Fellowship stick around...catch up with one another... its been 3 months!!!

The third is...

Praise

Psalm 5:11-12 But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy,

and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you. For you bless the righteous, O LORD; you cover him with favor as with a shield.

Lets Praise Jesus together.

