



Mechanic Grove Church of the Brethren

Continuing the Work of JesusPeacefully, Simply, Together

February 24, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Mechanic Grove Church of the Brethren in the Diaspora.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

All of us can agree that we have come through some difficult times as a nation and as a church. The recent snowstorms have only added to our challenges. But praise God we read in Psalm 126:5 'Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy'. Amidst the pandemic, political upheavals, economic hardships and concerns for unity in the church, we have much to celebrate at Mechanic Grove.

What a joy to celebrate the ordination of Rita Carter to the Christian ministry this past Sunday. How grateful we are for the calling of the Lord upon Sister Rita's life. Continue to offer her your support and encouragement as she serves as our pastor of visitation.

What a joy to learn that our congregation was listed as #37 in the top giving teams, churches and groups in the nation by Church World Service for the 2020 CROP Hunger Walk this past October.

What a joy to know how strongly you supported our youth fundraiser the other Sunday in ordering 200 pans of lasagna and contributing \$5,363 toward our youth ministry in financial donations.

What a joy to know that as of today, we have received a total of \$17,310 for the Mission Stimulus Fund which will go to the Delmas Church of the Brethren in Haiti to help them acquire a meeting place. Deadline for receiving Mission Stimulus Funds for this project is March 1.

Some changes will be taking place in our Sunday morning worship services. We have been blessed with a number of our members who have agreed to tell children's stories which will be part of both worship services each week. Several of these folks are new to telling children's stories.

We also have a very nice list of members who are willing to serve as worship leaders. Several of these folks are new to being worship leaders.

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I praise God for the many who are volunteering to help in the ministries of our church. I sense a growing spirit of excitement in our church.

There will be a change in the way in which we share praises and prayer concerns on Sunday mornings. Each Sunday there will be a half sheet listing all the praise and prayer concerns which will be compiled by Mary Etta and made available next to the bulletins. If you share something during joys and concerns on a Sunday morning, I am asking that you share your name since I don't know all of you yet and to be sure if you share a name that you have that person's permission. We need to be mindful that our worship services are going out over the internet and we need to be careful what we share.

It was a sad day to learn that this week we surpassed 500,000 people in our country who have died of COVID which is a fraction of deaths world-wide. We pray for vaccines to be available for those desiring them. On a personal note, Lib and I are thankful that we plan to receive our first vaccine on February 25.

With more of our number receiving the vaccine, it is my hope that more of you will start returning to in-person worship services. We do miss several of you but understand your concern for safety. When you feel comfortable returning, we will be eager to see you. In the meantime, we all need to do our part to help provide the safety of others with our masks and physical distancing.

This coming Sunday's message will focus of the saying of Jesus: 'I am the door' based upon John 10:1-8 and Revelation 22:13.

"Grace and peace with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ". Ephesians 6:24

Bob Kettering, Interim Senior Pastor

I AM THE DOOR

- I. Today's message continues a sermon series on the self-disclosure statements of our Savior, namely the I AM sayings of Jesus. This morning we will focus on the saying of Jesus from John's Gospel chapter 10 in which Jesus said: "I am the door." Now depending on which translation of the Bible you have, you may be a bit confused. The New Revised Standard Version which is the version in our pew Bibles and the version from which we usually read in our worship services, translates this saying of Jesus as 'I am the gate.'

- II. I found that of the various translations and paraphrases of the Bible, some record this saying of Jesus as 'I am the door' and others 'I am the gate.' The King James Version, the New King James Version, the New English Bible and Phillips paraphrase all use the word *door*. 'I am the door.'
- III. The Living Bible, the Contemporary English Bible, the Jerusalem Bible and the Message paraphrase use the word *gate*. 'I am the gate.' I went to the original Greek word *thura* and I believe *door* is the best English translation. For good measure I went to my German Bible and Luther used the phrase 'Ich bin die Tur'. *Tur* is the German word for *door*, not *gate*. So, for my purpose for today's sermon, I will use the tried and true King James translation of this phrase of Jesus who says: 'I am the door.'
- IV. There are many types of doors which have been in use since civilization started dwelling in fixed abodes. In earliest civilizations the door may have been sticks tied together across the opening of caves...or animal skins covering the entrances of dwellings. In ancient Israel, the Jews were primarily nomads who dwelled in tents. The door for them was probably some type of woven cloth placed over the entrance of the tent to provide privacy and protection from predators and the elements.
- the doors of the temple in Jerusalem were made of gold and were so heavy that it took several people to open and close them. Today doors are wood, or glass or metal or plastic or a combination of those materials in our homes and buildings.
 - in addition to doors being entrances to buildings; doors are often used in a symbolic sense to indicate something which may be making an entrance. Or a door can symbolize opportunity. Some examples I have heard lately are:
 - let's work on legislation that will provide a door to citizenship for illegal immigrants
 - if we expand gambling in Pennsylvania we will be opening the door to more crime and Mafia activity
 - if you study real hard it will be the door to a good job later in life.
 - if we have more COVID vaccines available it will provide a door to herd immunity.
- V. You see, the word 'door' conjures up many images and symbols in our minds. In the scriptures, the image of the door is used several times.
- Luke 13:24 "Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many will seek to enter and will not be able."
 - Acts 14:27 "And they declared how God had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles."
 - I Corinthians 16:9 "Paul said: 'I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me.'"
 - Revelation 3:8 "To the church in Philadelphia: I have set before you an open door."

VI. When Jesus used the image of the door in the saying before us this morning, he had in mind the gate or door to a sheepfold...another sermon about sheep! John chapter 10 records Jesus drawing upon the image of sheep, a shepherd and a sheepfold. In order to understand the real significance of this example. We must first examine this saying in its context.

-in the passage of scripture from John chapter 10, Jesus refers to two types of sheepfolds. Most every village and town in Palestine had communal sheepfolds where all the village flocks were sheltered when they returned to the town at night from their grazing. These sheepfolds were protected by a strong door of which only the guardian of the door held the key. That is the kind of sheepfold Jesus referred to in verses 2 & 3 when he said: "He who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep, to him the gatekeeper opens."

VII. But there is another type of sheepfold which Jesus had in mind in verses 7-9. This second style of sheepfold was used when the sheep were out on the hills in the warm season and did not return at night to the village at all. There were no fences around the fields where the sheep grazed. At night, so that the sheep would not wander away, there were sheepfolds made of stones just high enough to keep the sheep from getting out with an opening into this sheepfold no wider than three feet which was the entrance for the sheep; but there was no gate or door across that entrance of any kind.

-what happened was that the shepherd at night would lay down or sit across that opening to the sheepfold ensuring that no sheep could get out and no predator get into the sheepfold except over the shepherd's body. The shepherd himself literally became the door to the sheepfold.

VIII. Sir George Adam Smith several years ago travelled through Palestine and told of a most interesting encounter. One day George Adam Smith was travelling with a guide and happened to come across a Bedouin nomad shepherd tending his sheep. They communicated with each other through the guide. The Bedouin shepherd showed Smith the fold into which the sheep were led at night. It consisted of four stone walls with pointed sticks on top of the stone walls with a three foot break in the wall that served as the entrance, just like in Jesus' day.

IX. Smith asked the shepherd: "Is this where the sheep spend the night?" "Yes", replied the shepherd; "And when they are in there, they are perfectly safe." "But there is no gate or door", Smith observed. Do you know what the shepherd replied? He said: "I am the door!"

-even though the Bedouin shepherd was not a Christian...even though he was not speaking in the language of the New Testament...nevertheless the statement was exactly the image Jesus had in mind in John chapter 10.

-Smith looked at the Bedouin and asked: "What do you mean by the door?" The shepherd replied: "When daylight has gone and all the sheep are safe inside the fold, I lie down in that open space in the wall where the sheep enter the sheepfold and no sheep ever goes out but across my body and no wolf ever comes in unless he crosses over my body...I am the door."

- X. This self-disclosure statement of Jesus is significant at two points. First of all, Jesus is the only access to God. Secondly, by Jesus being the door to the sheepfold; he is our security and in him we are safe from sin and evil. If we put our faith, our trust, our confidence in him, he will protect us from evil.

-temptations may come our way, but by Jesus being the door of the sheepfold, he helps us keep those temptations away and helps us overcome our temptations. Some Christians have the mistaken impression that once they receive Christ all problems, heartaches and temptations will never again come knocking at their door.

-but the truth is: heartaches do come to Christians; temptations still afflict God's people; problems still beset believers; but the good news is that there is a door to the sheepfold; a protector of God's people. Jesus Christ is that door to our hearts and lives which will help us overcome the problems which beset us.

- XI. The Apostle Paul reminds us in I Corinthians 10:13: "No temptation has overcome you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

-it is wonderful to know that the entrance way to God's people is not unprotected but has a door: Jesus Christ, who is capable of helping ward off evil from having an even greater toll among us.

- XII. But there is another example in scripture of a door and that door is the door which is at the threshold of our own individual lives. Jesus speaks of this door in Revelation 3:20 "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice I will come in to him..."

-your life and my life is like a door. You and I determine when that door opens and when that door is closed...that is the freedom...the free will which God endows upon every person on this earth.

- XIII. It is a wonderful but awesome freedom; for it demands responsibility and decision-making on your part and mine. It demands discernment as to the things we will allow to enter into our lives: attitudes...habits...ideas and actions...and which things we keep out of our lives.

-Christ wants to enter your life and mine through that door...to live and reign and dwell within our hearts. In the Book of Revelation Jesus tells us that he will not barge in...he will not force an entry into your heart. When he comes to the door of your heart he never pushes his way in where he might be unwanted. Jesus said: "I stand at the door and knock."

-God has made the first move. The Bible says we love because God first loved us. While we were yet sinners, Christ loved us. That is the beauty and mystery of God's grace and his love. No matter how ugly or sinful; distasteful or disgusting your life has been, Jesus still wants to come into your heart.

-He may have a lot of remodeling and transforming to do, but no one is beyond Christ's love and concern. He comes to the doors of each of us. But he always comes knocking. You and I must open the door and invite him in. Once he has come through that door to our hearts, he then becomes the doorway to God!

- XIV. One of our Brethren saints from a previous generation was Anna Mow. In her book 'Say Yes to Life' she tells the story of a young girl who experienced Christ coming to the door of her heart in this way: "One day Jesus came to the door of my heart and knocked. I said: "Come in, Jesus." He came in and now he lives in my heart. Not long after he came in, there was another knock on the door. This time I said: 'Jesus, you go to the door.' He did and when he opened the door...Satan was standing there. When Satan saw Jesus, he said: 'O excuse me, I got the wrong door.'

-that simple illustration is one of my favorites because it expresses so beautifully the symbolism of Revelation 3:20.

- XV. When Jesus Christ is reigning within us full and free, we never have to go to the door alone again when there is a knock; for Jesus will be there with us and in a sense, he can become the door to our lives just like the shepherd who becomes the door to the sheepfold, keeping out all the evil influences which would prey upon the sheep.

-are your wrestling with some sin or temptation in your life this morning? Are your friends or colleagues or neighbors trying to sway you away from what Christ would have you do? Is there some bad habit trying to gain mastery in your life? Is there some resentment or brokenness wrecking a relationship with another person...maybe even a brokenness with someone within our very own church? What does Jesus want for you? What things does Jesus want to see radiate in your life or possibly change in your life?

- XVI. Jesus said truly 'I say to you...I am the door.' Is Christ knocking on the door of your heart this morning? Patiently he knocks. Will you open the door and let him come in? He wants to guard you from sin and protect you from adversity. Let him be your heart's door.